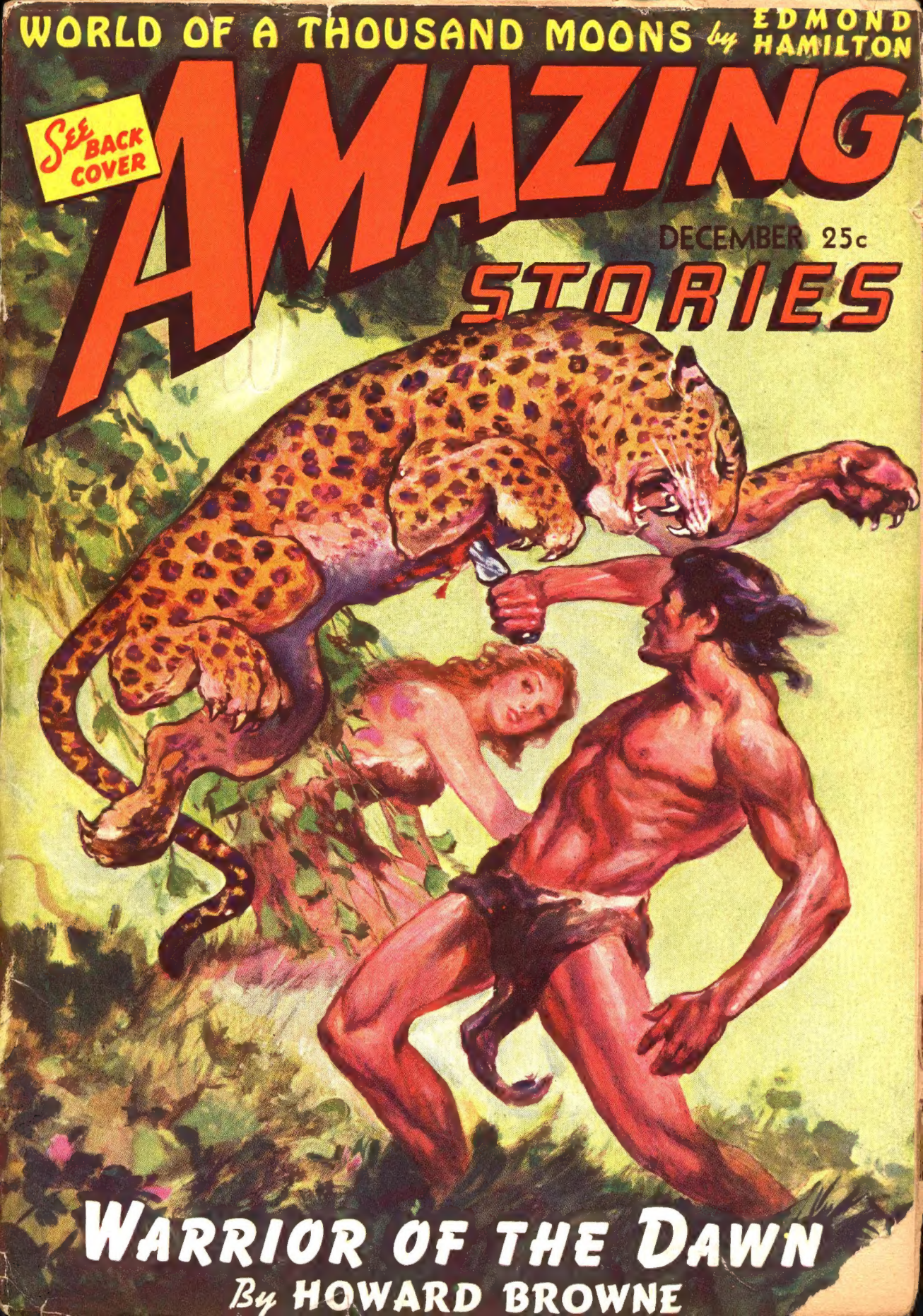
WORLD OF A THOUSAND MOONS by EDMOND HAMILTON

SEE BACK COVER

AMAZING STORIES

DECEMBER 25c



WARRIOR OF THE DAWN

By HOWARD BROWNE

Washing your hair?

LISTERINE to guard against infectious type of DANDRUFF

HERE'S a tip from the lips of thousands of men and women who have been helped by the Listerine treatment:

As a part of every shampoo, either preceding or following it, as you prefer, use full strength Listerine Antiseptic, followed by vigorous and persistent massage.

The minute Listerine Antiseptic reaches scalp and hair it kills literally millions of germs, including the stubborn "bottle bacillus," recognized by many outstanding dandruff specialists as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

Your hair and scalp will feel wonderfully clean and fresh and threatening germ-invaders will be combated in large numbers.

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If the infectious type of dandruff has really made headway on your scalp repeat the Listerine treatment at least once a day. Twice a day is better. You will be amazed to find how quickly the distressing flakes and scales and the annoying itch begin to disappear.

Remember that 76% of the sufferers in a clinical test showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff at the end of four weeks of the Listerine Antiseptic treatment.

And what a contrast the Listerine method is to most of those suggested for troublesome scalp conditions! Fast-drying instead of sticky —clean-smelling instead of offensive—a delight instead of a chore. And remember, germ-killing the minute you use it!

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

The TREATMENT

WOMEN: Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic. **MEN:** Douse full strength Listerine on the scalp morning and night.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years in the field of Oral Hygiene.

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC

Learn at Home to Make More Money

There is a SHORTAGE of RADIO Technicians and Radio Operators

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 27 years

I Trained These Men

$10 a Week in Spare Time

"I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I don't see how you give so much for such a small amount of money. I have made an average of $10 a week—just spare time." JOHN JERRY, 1126 Mariposa St., Denver, Colo.

$200 a Month In Own Business

"In business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field." ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 500 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

Lieutenant in Signal Corps

"I was a Sergeant in U. S. Army Signal Corps. My duties covered Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers. I am now a 2nd Lieutenant. (Name and address omitted for military reasons.)

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator." HOLLIS F. HAYES, 337 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

Does $5, $10 a week EXTRA money sound good to you? Then be a Radio Technician! I will quickly show you how to make that much fixing Radios in spare time while I train you for a good full time job. Do you think a steady job paying as much as $50 a week is worth finding out about? MAIL THE COUPON!

Radio now offers more spare and full time jobs than ever before. Many beginners I trained are doing interesting work for Broadcasting Stations and Radio Manufacturers, or are earning good pay as Civilian Radio Technicians with the Government. Do YOU want to get in this live-wire, growing field? Read how I'll train you at home in spare time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN OR OPERATOR!

How My "50-50 Method" Paves the Way to Bigger Pay!

My "50-50 Method"—half building real Radio circuits and conducting hundreds of fascinating tests and experiments with Radio parts I supply, and half learning from fully illustrated lessons—takes you step-by-step along the path others have followed to security and good pay. I begin at the beginning, explain things clearly.

Before you know it you find yourself "old friends" with the miracle of Radio. You easily put your finger on the trouble-spot in defective Radios; astonish friends with your practical Radio knowledge—use that knowledge to make $5, $10 a week extra money fixing Radios in spare time. My EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS, beginning with the first lesson, tell how to do it!

More Radio Technicians Now Make $30, $40, $50 a Week Than Ever Before

The Radio repair business is booming. There's room in almost every neighborhood for more spare or full time Radio Technicians. Many I trained have opened their own Radio Service shops. Broadcasting Stations pay good money to many Radio Technicians and Operators. Radio Manufacturers are rushing to fill Government contracts. The Government needs hundreds of Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians.

And think of the jobs in Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio, Public Address Systems. Think of the NEW jobs Television and other Radio developments will bring when war is over! N. R. I. gives you the required Radio training for these jobs. At left are just a few of the hundreds of men N. R. I. started on the road to good pay in Radio.

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MAIL THE COUPON—I will send you FREE my valuable 64-page illustrated book, RICH REWARDS IN RADIO. No obligation. Packed with facts about Radio. Things you never knew about Broadcasting, Radio Servicing, Manufacturing, Ship and Harbor Radio, Government, Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio, Television, Loud Speaker Systems.

Crammed with photos of Radio Technicians and Operators at work. Snapshots and letters from men I trained, so you can know what N. R. I. did for other fellows. Pictures of N. R. I. teachers, complete description of my Course and "50-50 Method"—Experimental Kits—Extra Money Job Sheets—Consultation Service—Graduate Service—Diploma. This book tells what Radio offers and how *you* can train to become a Radio Technician. If you want to JUMP YOUR PAY—MAIL COUPON NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 2MM, National Radio Institute
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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book RICH REWARDS IN RADIO. (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John, illustrating a scene from "Warrior Of The Dawn"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles, depicting the "Glider Of Ganymede"
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Volume 18 Number 12

Plan Your Future

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- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ Stenotypy

Name..... Age.....

Position..... Address.....

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

ONCE in a while we get a fan letter that is so good it ought to draw down our regular word rate, instead of being printed in Discussions as an open letter from a reader. The letter which follows is being placed in our editorial column for one reason—to give a group of readers a break! That group is the one which remarks occasionally: "Don't you ever get any letters that *do not* praise? Or do you weed them out?" Well, we finally received such a letter, the neatest bit we've ever gotten! And to prove how much it tickled us to get it, we pass it on to you as proof that we can count among our readers, even the fellow who owns the original "needle"!

"SIRS: Having seen this mag on the stands, I decided to buy one. I didn't realize what a foolish thing I did until I started to read it.

"I have read some lousy magazines, but this wreck is the corniest I have ever had the misfortune to buy. The stories that you have the gall to print are strictly crummy. They look like the kind that was turned down by every other magazine on the market and came to you as a last resort.

"The only thing that makes sense in your book is the page number.

"When I read those Discussions in the back, it looked like the only ones you printed were the ones that overflowed with praise; or do you make them up yourself just to show you got a so-called good magazine, you think?

"I double-dare you to print this letter, but you probably won't because the editors are undoubtedly chicken-hearted. Now, be honest for just once and print this."

THERE you are, readers! No use trying to beat that one. So you might as well go on praising us. The ultimate needle has been needled! We are not publishing the writer's name and address, because people in Royal Oak, Michigan, might go to 1015 Irving Street, and enter into a debate with Jack Ball. And after all, it's just a matter of opinion, and we've all got a right to that, eh?

ALL of which leads us up to the editorial "rave" over the *piece de resistance* of this ultra-excellent December issue. In these hallowed pages you will find the first instalment of Howard Browne's great novel of Cro-Magnon Man, "Warrior Of The Dawn". As Mr. Browne remarks, looking over our shoulder, we are sticking our neck out so far we look like a giraffe. But we'll risk it! After all, it's the story that's out on a limb—and that's where we believe you'll be . . . with sheer excitement!

TO MAKE this bragging business brief, we'll skim hurriedly over the rest of the swell stories in this issue: First, there's Robert Moore Williams' "Planet Of The Gods" which is certainly typical of Bob—which means it's a corker. Then there's Edmond Hamilton with "The World With a Thousand Moons", a unique sort of interplanetary story, you'll have to admit when you've read it. Clark South gives us "The Time Mirror", especially constructed of the finest time story materials to satisfy the thousands of you who love this type of story. Chester S. Geier, who is one of our earliest fans turned writer, by the way, presents a story of eerie terror called "The Sphere Of Sleep". Leroy Yerxa, newest addition to our regular writing family, presents "One Way Ticket To Nowhere", (incidently, he's just sold us a sequel to "Death Rides At Night" featuring those amazing super trucks of his!) and Dwight V. Swain, also a product of our own little genius school, returns with another Henry Horn story. To finish up the line-up, Gerald Vance's latest, "Monsoons Of Death" is probably one of his best. Off hand, we'd say it was a "magnificent" (who's got a better word?) issue!

J. ALLEN ST. JOHN painted the cover for Mr. Browne's story "very specially" he tells us. In fact, he believes that it is worthy of exhibition in a coming presentation of art work at the Art Institute in Chicago, and will hang it there during the exhibition. We know you'll like it, and we expect that Mr. Browne will spend many hours later on in life staring at it on his study wall—because that's where it's going.

IF YOUR work requires that you be on your feet all day long, your backbone spring is jammed together and you shrink as much as one inch during the day. But don't let that worry you because a good night's rest puts you back to your normal height. Just think what would happen to our postmen, policemen, and other men who stand all day if Nature had forgotten to "stretch" us out at night!

OUR delving into "odd" fact sources brings this tasty tidbit to light.

The dassie or coney is the closest living relative of the elephant regardless of the fact that it is only the size of a rabbit! It looks like a rodent, but the structure of its anatomy proves that it is a relative of the rhinoceros and horse, in addition to the elephant. The home of the dassie is Africa.

Its relationship to the elephant is proved by its internal characters and its foot structure, while its molar teeth closely resemble those of the rhinoceros. All of these animals belong to the class known as hoofed mammals.

ONE of the most disagreeable tasks around the house is to keep the silverware polished and free from tarnish.

Now comes the news that a patent has been issued to James Ryder, who claims that he can produce tarnish free silverware. His process involves giving the silverware a "bath" in a solution of silver chloride, compounds of tin and uranium, and some non-metallic substances. The electroplating is so enduring and brilliant that the silverware need not be polished nor will it tarnish when it comes in contact with foods containing sulfur.

Sometimes we wonder how many of our writers use these little facts we dig up as basic material for their stories? The above reminds of the stunt Nelson Bond recently pulled in his Lancelot Biggs story. If so, we're just reversing the process this time. But seriously, we wonder how many of our readers could suggest plots, ideas for stories, from the bits we present here. Anybody got any ideas? We'll pass 'em on to writers, if you have.

THE oyster just can't seem to make up its mind as to whether it wants to be a male or a female. Being able to change its sex, it changes from male to female from one year to another. The first year of life is usually spent as a male, but in the second year about fifty percent become females. Some continue these sex reversals for many years.

FIFTY-FIVE children between the ages of ten and twelve years unknowingly served as guinea pigs during tests conducted by the Department of Agriculture to determine ways of getting children to drink more milk.

Each morning a child was given a glass of milk and told to drink only as much as he wanted to. Each day the glass of milk was different. The variety was made up of plain milk, colored but unflavored milk, colored and sweetened milk, and milk flavored and colored with berry and fruit juices. The amount of milk left in the glass was measured each day and after the test was completed the favorite milk was found to be the milk mixed with berry or fruit juices. They only left 10.3 per cent of this milk while leaving over 22 per cent, on the average, of all the other combinations as well as plain milk.

As for our children, we just tell 'em Adam Link brought it from Mars, and he drinks it to make him strong, and they swallow it!

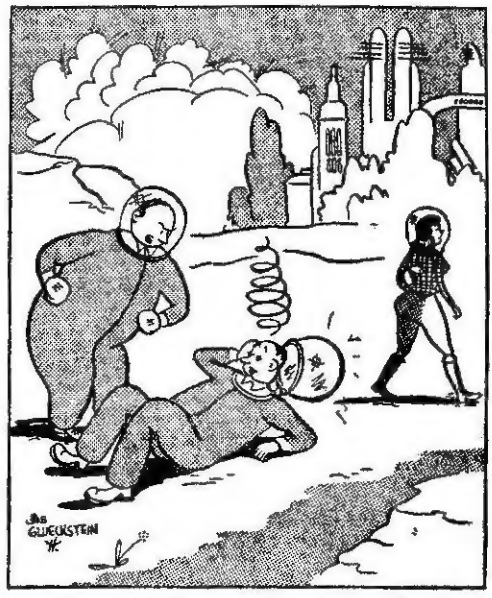
THE Australian Museum at Sydney claims that the new bird-of-paradise species they have added to their collection has the longest tail for a bird of its size.

Some of the birds have tails as long as thirty-six inches, which is over four times as long as their body. Only the males possess such a long tail, which consists of two thin white plumes. In addition, the handsome male possesses a brown body and wings, with a metallic green throat and head. A large tuft of velvety feathers adorns the upper base of his bill.

The female, on the other hand, does not possess the long tail and is only a very plain brown in color.

This beautiful bird was named McNicholl's ribbon-tailed bird-of-paradise, in honor of Sir Walter McNicholl, administrator of New Guinea, where the bird was found.

(Continued on page 192)



"Dope! I told you not to tip your hat!"

Thorn stared in amazement at the city that lay before him

OF THE DAWN

by HOWARD BROWNE

(A two-part serial. Part One)

CHAPTER I

In Quest of Vengeance

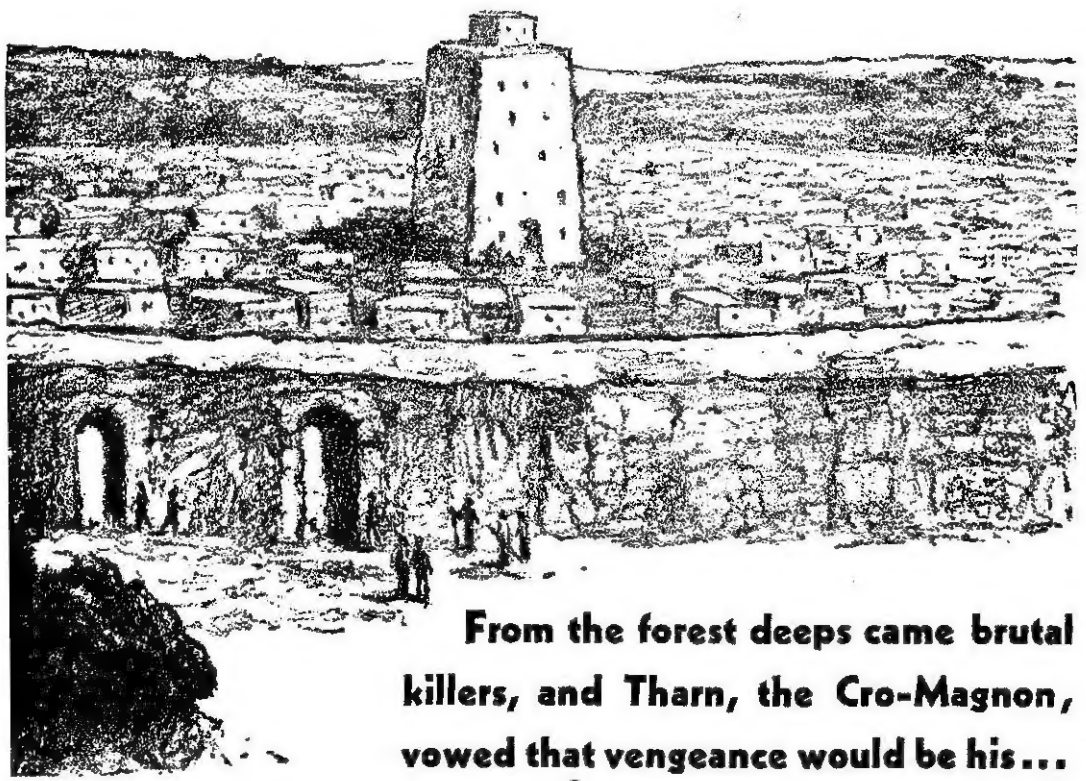
IT WAS late afternoon. Neela, the zebra, and his family of fifteen grazed quietly near the center of a level stretch of grassland. In the distance, and encircling the expanse of prairie, stood a solid wall of forest and close-knit jungle.

For the past two hours of this long hot afternoon Neela had shown signs of increasing nervousness. Feeding a short distance from the balance of his charges, he lifted his head from time to time to stare intently across the wind-stirred grasses to the east. Twice he had started slowly in that direction, only to stop short, stamp and snort uneasily, then wheel about and retrace his steps.

The remainder of the herd cropped calmly at the long grasses, apparently heedless of their leader's unrest, tails slapping flanks clear of biting flies.

Meanwhile, some two hundred yards to the eastward, three half-naked white hunters, belly-flat in the concealing growth, continued their cautious advance.

Wise in the ways of wary grass-eaters



From the forest deeps came brutal killers, and Tharn, the Cro-Magnon, vowed that vengeance would be his...

were these three members of a Cro-Magnard tribe, living in a day some twenty thousand years before the founding of Rome.* With the wind against their faces, with their passage as soundless as only veteran hunters may make it, they knew the zebra had no cause for alarm beyond a vague suspicion born of instinct alone.

And so the three men slipped forward, a long spear trailing in each right hand, their only guide the keen ears this primitive life had developed.

One of the three, a stocky man with a square, strong face and heavily muscled body, deep-tanned, paused to adjust his grasp on the stone-tipped spear he carried. As he did so there was a quick stir in the tangled grasses near his hand and Sleeza, the snake, struck savagely at his fingers.

With a startled, involuntary shout, the man jerked away, barely avoiding the deadly fangs. And then he snatched the flint knife from his loin-cloth and plunged it fiercely again and again into Sleeza's threshing body.

When finally he stopped, the mottled coils were limp in death. He saw then that his companions were standing erect, staring to the west.

From his sitting position he looked up at the others.

"Neela—?" he began.

"—has fled," finished one of the hunters. "He heard you quarreling with Sleeza. We cannot catch him, now."

The third man grinned. "Next time, Barkoo, let Sleeza bite you. While you may die, at least our food will not run away!"

Ignoring the grim attempt at humor, Barkoo scrambled to his feet and watched, in helpless rage, the bobbing heads and flying legs of Neela and his flock, now far away.

Barkoo swore mightily. "And it's too late to hunt further," he growled. "As it is, darkness will come before we reach the caves of Tharn. To return

*Probably no race of man in all history has so stimulated the imagination of scientists as that of Cro-Magnon Man. The origin of the race is lost in antiquity, although its arrival on the scene was supposed to have taken place between 35,000 and 20,000 B.C. It is established, however, that hordes of the white-skinned, strong-thewed cave-dwellers over-ran, long before the dawn of history, what today is southern Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. This section of the earth's surface was sparsely populated, at the time, by Neanderthal Man—the last of the sub-human forerunners of Homo Sapiens.

Immediate warfare raged between the two. The Cro-Magnards, while lacking the tremendous muscles and long, ape-like arms of the Neanderthaloids, were far more intelligent (as witness the dimensions of their heads; a brain-case exceeding in size that of present day man), and gradually eliminated the native Neanderthals. Between the two, there was little difference in man-made weapons. The principal weapon of both was the club; but, in Cro-Magnon's case, this was augmented by the flint knife, clumsily shaped but effective. It is entirely possible that the latter people made use of the rope, both as one of the amenities and as a weapon of offense.

Cro-Magnon Man was the proud possessor of a virtue both new and startling in a world given only to the struggle for survival. This virtue was Leisure—a period in which he was free to do things other than kill his enemies, hunt, and eat. He used his leisure to develop an artistic sense that found its expression in the painting of everyday scenes from his life. The walls of his cave served as a canvas; his materials, principally ochre, he took from the earth. He was the first Artist; and his paintings, still admirable considering the lack of guiding precedence, have endured to this day.

In appearance, Cro-Magnon Man was ruggedly handsome, both in figure and face. He was long-headed, with a short face patterned on the diamond. The width was extreme, with high cheek-bones slanting up to a narrowing forehead, and down to a short, firm chin. Above a long, finely moulded mouth, the strong, usually prominent nose jutted out imperiously.

The female was considerably smaller than her mate, often reaching no more than to his shoulders. Possibly she was lovely of face and figure; we of today have no evidence to the contrary.

There are authorities who insist no finer specimen of humankind ever existed than the Cro-Magnard. Whether or not this is true, does not alter the fact that he was able to carve a secure niche in a savage and implacable world, and, at the same time, place the feet of his descendants on the path to civilization and a more sheltered life.—Ed.

empty-handed besides—"

One of his companions suddenly caught Barkoo by the arm. "Look!" he cried, pointing toward the west.

A YOUNG man, clad only in an animal skin about his middle, had leaped from a clump of grasses less than twenty yards from the fleeing herd. In one hand was a long war-spear held aloft as he swooped toward them.

Instantly the herd turned aside and with a fresh burst of speed sought to out-run this new danger.

"Look at him run!" Barkoo shouted.

With the speed of a charging lion the youth was covering the ground in mighty bounds, slanting rapidly up to the racing animals. A moment later and he had drawn abreast of a sleek young mare, her slim ears backlaid in terror.

Still running at full speed, the young man drew back his arm and sent his spear flashing across the gap between him and the mare, catching her full in the exposed side.

As though her legs had been jerked from under her, the creature turned a complete circle in mid-air before crashing to the ground, her scream of agony coming clearly to the three watching hunters.

Barkoo, when the young man knelt beside the kill, shook his head in tight-lipped tribute.

"I might have known he would do something like this," he said, exasperated. "When I asked him to come with us he refused; the sun was too hot. Now he will laugh at us—taunt us as bad hunters."

"Some day he will not come back from the hunt," predicted one of the men. "He takes too many chances. He goes out alone after Jalok, the panther, and Tarlok, the leopard, with only a knife and a rope. Why, just a sun ago, I heard him say Sadu, the lion, was to be next. Smart hunters leave Sadu alone!"

Tharn, the son of Tharn, watched the three come slowly toward him. His unbelievably sharp eyes of gray caught Barkoo's attempt at an unimpressed expression, and his own lean handsome face broke in a wide smile, the small even white teeth contrasting vividly with his sun-baked skin.

He wondered what had caused the zebra herd to bolt before the hunters could attempt their kill. He had caught sight of them an hour before from the high-flung branches of a tree, and had hidden in the grass near the probable route of the animals once Barkoo and his men had charged them.

Barkoo, seeming to ignore the son of his chief, came up to the dead zebra and nudged it with an appraising toe.

"Not much meat here," he said to Korgul. "A wise hunter would have picked a fatter one."

Tharn's lips twitched with amusement. He knew Barkoo—knew he found fault only to hide an extravagant satisfaction that the chief's son had succeeded where older heads had failed; for Barkoo had schooled him in forest lore almost from the day Tharn had first walked.

That had been a little more than twenty summers ago; today Tharn was more at home in the jungles and on the plains than any other member of his tribe. His confidence had grown with his knowledge until he know nothing of fear and little of caution. He took impossible chances for the pure love of danger, flaunting his carelessness in the face of his former teacher, jeering at the other's gloomy prophecies of disaster.

Tharn pursed his lips solemnly. "It is true," he admitted soberly, "that a wiser hunter would have made a better

choice. That is, if he were not so clumsy that the meat would run away first. Then the wise hunter would not be able to kill even a little Neela. Wise old men cannot run fast."

Barkoo glared at him. "It was Sleeza," he snapped, then reddened at being trapped into a defense. He wheeled on the grinning Korgul. "Get a strong branch," he said sharply . . .

WITH the dead weight of the kill swinging from the branch between Korgul and Torbat, the four Cro-Magnon hunters set out for the distant caves of their tribe.

Soon they entered the mouth of a beaten elephant path leading into the depths of dense jungle to the west. It was nearly dark here beneath the overspreading forest giants, the huge moss-covered boughs festooned with loops and whorls of heavy vines. The air was overladen with the heavy smell of rotting vegetation; the sounds of innumerable small life were constantly in the hunters' ears. Here in the humid jungle, the bodies of the men glistened with perspiration.

By the time they had crossed the belt of woods to come into the open at the beginning of another prairie, Dyta, the sun, was close to the western horizon. Hazy in the far distance were three low hills, their common base buried among a sizable clump of trees. In those hills were the caves of the tribe, and at sight of them the four men quickened their steps.

They were perhaps a third of the way across the open ground, when Tharn, in the lead, halted abruptly, his eyes on a section of the grasses some hundred yards ahead.

Barkoo came up beside him. "What is it?" he asked tensely.

Tharn shrugged. "I don't know—yet. The wind is wrong. But something is crawling toward us very slowly and with many pauses."

Barkoo grunted. Tharn's uncanny instinct in locating and identifying unseen creatures annoyed him. It smacked too strongly of kinship with the wild beasts; it was not natural for a human to possess that sort of ability.

"Come," said Tharn. With head erect, the long spear trailing in his right hand, he set out at a brisk pace, his companions close on his heels.

They had gone half the way when a low moan came to the sharp ears of the younger man. In it was a note of human suffering and physical agony so pitiful that Tharn abandoned all caution and plunged forward.

And then he was parting the rank grasses from above the motionless body of a boy, lying there face down. From a purple-edged hole in his right side blood dripped in great red blobs to form a widening pool beneath him.

Tenderly Tharn slipped an arm beneath the shoulders of the youngster and carefully turned him to his back. Even as he recognized the familiar features, pale beneath a coat of bronze, he was aware of Barkoo behind him. Before he could turn, a strong hand thrust him roughly to one side and the older man was kneeling beside the wounded boy.

"Dartoog!" he cried, his tone a blending of fear and horror and monstrous rage. "Dartoog, my son! What has happened? Who has done this to you?"

Weakly the boy's eyes opened. In the brown depths at first were only weariness and pain. Then they focused on the face of the man and lighted up wonderfully, while a faint smile struggled for a place on the graying lips.

"Father!" he gasped.

"Who did this?" demanded Barkoo for the second time.

THE eyes closed. Haltingly at first, then more smoothly as though finding strength in reliving the story, Dartoog spoke:

"It happened only a little while ago. I was near the foot of one of the hills, making a spear. A few warriors and women were near me; the rest of our people were in the caves.

"Then, suddenly, many strange fighting-men sprang out from behind trees at the edge of the clearing. They were as many as leaves on a big tree. With loud war-cries they ran at us; and before we could get away they had thrown their spears. I tried to run; but a big warrior caught me and struck me with his knife."

The son of Barkoo fell silent. Tharn, a flaming rage growing within him, bent nearer. Behind him were Korgul and Torbat, both very still, their faces strained.

"Then," the boy continued, "came Tharn, the chief, with our fighting-men. They came running from the caves and threw themselves upon the strangers.

"It was a great fight! Many times did the strange warriors try to beat back our men, and as many times did they fail. Tharn, our chief, was the reason. So many men that I could not count them, died beneath his knife and spear. But at last he, too, fell with a spear in his back.

"While they were fighting I crawled to the trees. Then I got to my feet and ran this way as far as I could. I wanted to find you, father, that you might go and kill them all."

Dartoog's voice, growing weaker, now ceased altogether. Twice he opened his lips to speak but no words came. Then, his throat swelling with a supreme effort, he cried out: "Go, father! Go, before they—" His voice broke, his body stiffened, then relaxed and he fell back, sighing.

Gently the father cradled his son's head in the circle of his arms. Once more the clear brown eyes opened. The man bent an ear to the lips framing further words.

"It—is—so—dark," came the barely audible whisper. As the boy finished speaking, his body slumped, his head dropped back and life left him.

Barkoo sat as graven in stone, head bowed above the dead body of his only son. There was no sound but that of the rustling grasses stirring lazily in the early evening breeze from the east.

Young Tharn was the first to move. Shaking his head like a hurt lion, he leaped to his feet, caught up his spear and set out at a run toward the distant caves.

By the time he had passed through the trees bounding the clearing before the hills, darkness was very near.

He came into the center of utter confusion. Everywhere about the wide clearing were bodies — some dead, others desperately wounded. Instantly Tharn set about organizing the dazed survivors; and it was only after the injured had been cared for and the dead placed in long rows in two of the recesses, that he found sufficient courage to ask about his father.

"We took a spear from his back and carried him to his own cave," was the answer. "I do not know if he still lives; he was not dead when we took him there."

Tharn, closer to knowing fear than he could ever remember, raced upward along the narrow ledges before the cave mouths. Near the crest he passed through the wide entrance of a large natural cavern, its interior lighted by means of dishes of animal fat in which were burning wicks of twisted grasses.

A GROUP of warriors and women at the rear of the cave, drew aside

as Tharn approached, revealing the magnificent figure of their leader lying upon a great pile of furry pelts. Although the eyes were closed and the strong regular features bore evidence of suffering, Tharn's heart lost its burden when he saw the broad chest rising and falling evenly.

Seated on a small flat-topped boulder beside the bed was Old Myrdon, pressing juices from herbs in a stone bowl. Old Myrdon had brought back to health more wounded fighting men than he could remember; and his long familiarity with death and suffering had completely soured his naturally acid disposition.

The young man placed a hand on the forehead of the sleeping chief, gratified to find the skin cool and moist. He noticed the compress of herbs bound in place high up on his father's back, and knew, then, the spear had not touched a vital spot, that with proper care rapid recovery would follow.

He moved to Myrdon's side. "Take good care of him, Old One," he said quietly.

The healer jerked his shoulder from under Tharn's hand. "I do not need advice from you," he growled, his wrinkled fingers grinding the rock pestle savagely against the bowl's contents. "If he lives it will be because I want him to live."

Tharn's grim expression did not change. "Take good care of him," he repeated evenly. "If he dies—you die!"

Startled, Myrdon raised his head. But Tharn had turned away and was striding toward the exit.

At the foot of the cliff he found Barkoo and Korgul and Torbat talking with a group of warriors. The son of the chief shouldered his way to the center. Darkness had come while he had been aloft and the only light came from two resinous flares.

In silence they looked at Tharn's set face. He was aware that they were regarding him strangely—almost expectantly. They seemed to sense that the carefree boy they had known was gone —replaced by a young warrior.

"Which way," demanded Tharn, "did they go?"

A tall, thin warrior with a bloody scratch across his forehead replied: "When they saw they could not gain the caves, they fell back. After they had disappeared among the trees, I followed for a time. Their path led into the south along the trail where we slew Pandor, the elephant, two suns ago."

Barkoo rubbed a hand thoughtfully across his smooth-scraped chin. "When Dyta comes again," he said, "we will start after them."

Tharn's mouth hardened. "You can wait for Dyta if you wish," he said slowly. "I am going after them now. They had no quarrel with us, but many of my friends—and yours—are dead. They killed Dartoog. They tried to kill my father. I am not going to wait."

"What can you hope to do alone, against many?" Barkoo asked in matter-of-fact tones. "Wait; go with us when it is light. There will be fighting enough for you then."

Without replying, Tharn stooped and caught up a flint-tipped war-spear. Then he re-coiled the folds of his grass rope about his shoulders and made sure the stone knife was secure in the folds of his loin-cloth.

He turned to the watching men. "I am going now," he said quietly. An instant later the black void of jungle had swallowed him up.

CHAPTER II

Dylara

UDA, the moon, had not yet risen above the trees when the Cro-Mag-

non youth plunged into the wilderness of growing things. As a result he found his way purely by his familiarity with the territory and a store of jungle lore not surpassed by the beasts themselves. Because of the dense darkness, he was guided by three senses alone: smell, hearing and touch; but these were ample when backed by the keen mind and superhuman strength bequeathed by heritage and environment.

The narrow game trail underfoot swerved abruptly to the west and rose rapidly. For several hundred feet the way was steep, became level for a short distance, then fell away in a long gentle slope to flatness once more.

All this was familiar ground to Tharn. The ridge containing the homes of his people was behind him now; from here on for a day's march was nothing but level country.

Now came Uda, her shining half-disc swinging low above the towering reaches of the trees, her white rays seeking to pierce the matted growth below. What little light came through was enough for Tharn's eyes to regain some degree of usefulness.

He was moving ahead at a slow trot, an hour afterward, when the shrill scream of a leopard broke suddenly from the trail ahead. Another time, and Tharn might have gone on—too proud to change his course in the face of possible peril. But tonight he had more urgent business than a brawl with Tarlok.

Turning at right angles into the wall of undergrowth lining the path, he vaulted into the lower branches of a sturdy tree. With the graceful agility of little Nobar, the monkey, he swung swiftly westward again, threading his way with deceptive ease along the network of swaying boughs, now and then swinging perilously across a wide span from one tree to the next.

Directly below was the beaten path; and now he caught sight of the animal whose scream he had heard. Tarlok was pacing leisurely in the same direction as that of the man overhead, pausing occasionally to give voice to his hunting squall, his spotted form barely visible among the shadows. Tharn passed silently above him, the leopard unaware of his nearness.

Onward raced the Cro-Magnard, his thoughts filled with the quest he had undertaken alone. His savage, untamed mind had dwelt so steadily upon the outrageous attack, that it finally brought an emotion so powerful as to be almost tangible: Hate, and for a companion, Revenge.

Never would he rest until this unknown tribe had felt the weight of his own personal wrath. For what they had done they must pay a thousandfold in lives and misery.

WITHOUT warning, the forest ended; and the cave lord dropped to the ground at the edge of a great plain, its bounds hidden in the ghostly moonlight.

A line of broken grasses began where the game path ended. So fresh was the trail, now, that Tharn knew he had best wait for sunrise before continuing the chase. He had no wish to dash headlong among the ranks of the very enemy he pursued.

A few moments later Tharn was sleeping soundly in a crotch of a high tree, his slumber undisturbed by the long familiar noises of a jungle night.

The sun was an hour high when he awakened. His first act was to climb to the highest pinnacle of the tree, and from that point attempt to pick out, if possible, the goal of those he sought.

He was immediately successful. Due west, far in the distance, he saw hills rising steeply amidst another forest.

His sharp eyes followed a wide line of broken grasses, noting that it pointed unerringly toward those same heights.

Tharn smiled grimly to himself. Soon the first member of that war-party would make the initial payment on the blood-debt. Making certain his weapons were in place, the broad-shouldered young man slid to the ground and took up a circuitous route, avoiding the open plain, which brought him finally to the forest's edge at a considerable distance away from the others' point of entry at the far side of the plain. If he had crossed the plain, sharp eyes might have noted his pursuit from just within the forest edge.

Once the trial was picked up again, he took to the comparative safety of the middle terraces. Soon he was moving in absolute silence above a narrow pathway winding into the gloomy interior, the imprints of many naked feet clear in the thick dust. But he no longer needed such evidence; the humid breeze was bringing the assorted smells of a Cro-Magnon settlement close ahead.

So close were the hills by this time that he was momentarily expecting the trees to thin out, when he caught the sound of a faint movement from below. Warily he slipped downward until, parting the foliage with a stealthy hand, he made out the figure of a tall muscular warrior standing in the trail, his attitude that of a sentry.

Tharn felt his pulses quicken as a new emotion came to him. In all his twenty-two years he had never been called upon to take a human life, and he found the prospect somewhat disquieting. Yet it was just such a purpose that he had in mind and there was no point in wasting time with self-analysis.

Noiselessly he slid to the ground and stepped onto the trail a few paces behind the stranger. With infinite stealth he lessened the space between the unsuspecting warrior and his own half crouched figure. Forgotten was the knife at his belt; his purpose was to close fingers about the other's throat.

Now, he was sufficiently near. The muscles of his legs tensed for the spring —and the enemy whirled to face him!

WHEN the guard saw the young giant's nearness and threatening position, his eyes flew wide in surprise and fear. His jaw dropped, but no sound came; his arms seemed frozen to his sides.

Before he could recover, Tharn was upon him. As the young cave-man's fingers clamped on the stranger's throat, a knee came up with savage force into Tharn's stomach, almost tearing loose his hold. But the maneuver cost the man his balance, and he fell backward with Tharn's weight across his chest.

Frantically the warrior fought to loosen the terrible grip cutting off his breath. He clawed wildly at the iron fingers, struck heavy blows at his attacker's face and body. But Tharn only tightened his hold, waiting grimly as the efforts to dislodge him became increasingly weaker. Then a convulsive shudder passed through the body, followed by complete limpness. The man was dead.

Tharn got to his feet. For a long moment he stood there, staring in wonder at the dead, distorted face. His thoughts were a jumble of conflicting emotions: pride at vanquishing a grown man by bare hands alone; strong satisfaction in an enemy's death; and a feeling of guilt at taking a human life. What was it that Barkoo had told him, long ago?

"Death cannot be understood, completely, by one who has never killed. A true warrior takes no life without knowing regret. Slay only when your life

is in danger, or when someone has wronged you. Those who kill for the love of killing are beneath the beasts; for beasts kill only for cause."

Tharn stooped, swung the corpse across his shoulder and entered the jungle. There he concealed the body and once more took to the trees.

The forest ended suddenly, some fifty yards from the base of an immense overhanging cliff. A single glance told Tharn that he had reached the trail's end, and he leaped lightly into the branches of a tree at the lip of the clearing. Swiftly he swarmed upward until a broad bough was reached that pointed outward toward the hillside.

Below and before him went on the everyday life of a Cro-Magnon village. Four women carved steaks from the freshly killed body of a deer; naked children climbed in and out of the caves and ran about the open ground; two girls, several seasons short of womanhood, scraped hair, by means of flint tools, from a deerskin staked flat to the ground.

There was but one thing lacking in this peaceful, commonplace picture, and Tharn noted its absence at once. There was not a single grown male in sight! Did this mean a trap had been laid for the pursuit which the warriors of this tribe had every reason to expect? Were they, then, lying in wait for Barkoo and his men at the outer rim of the forest?

Tharn was about to start back toward the prairie, when he suddenly stiffened to attention. A woman—a girl, rather; she could not have been more than eighteen—had slid to the ground from one of the caves. The man in the trees half rose to watch her.

She was a bit above average in height, slim, yet perfectly formed. That part of her body not covered by the soft folds of panther skin was evenly tanned but not darkly so. Soft, lustrous brown hair fell to her bare shoulders in lovely half-curls that gave off reddish glints when touched by the sun's direct rays.

This breath-taking young person was coming straight toward the very tree that sheltered him. As she drew nearer, he could make out her features more clearly, and he saw that the wide eyes were also brown, flecked with tiny bits of Dyta, the sun (or so he thought); her cheeks were high but not too prominent, her nose rather small but beautifully shaped. She walked gracefully, shoulders back, her head lifted proudly, an almost saucy tilt to her chin.

SHE passed beneath him and went on into the forest. Tharn came down quickly and set out to follow. Why he did so was not considered; some strange force drew him on. Less than twenty feet separated them, now; but so guarded were his movements that the girl was not aware of being trailed.

And now a small treeless glade stopped the stalker. Not daring to follow further, he watched her take an empty gourd from its hiding place in a clump of grasses and set about filling it with rich, red fruit from a cluster of low bushes.

Tharn watched her intently from behind the bole of a mighty tree. His eyes feasted on the matchless beauty of her face and form. Forgotten completely was the driving motive that had brought him this far from home. The flaming thirst for revenge was dead, quenched entirely by a flooding emotion, new to him but old as life itself.

A little later he saw that the girl's search for berries was bringing her close to a tree some fifty feet to his left. Swinging easily into the foliage overhead, he moved silently along the boughs until the strange princess was directly below.

And as he drew to a pause, Tarlok,

the leopard, rose from the screen of leaves just beneath him and, crouching briefly, sprang without warning at the golden form fifteen feet below.

That second of hesitation on the part of the cat, saved the girl's life. Tharn, trained to think and to act in the same instant, was in mid-air as Tarlok's claws left the bark. And so, inches from that softly curved back, the beast was swept aside by the impact of a hundred and seventy pounds of muscular manhood.

Snarling its rage, the cat wheeled as it struck the earth, then pounced, almost in the same motion, at Tharn's half-kneeling figure. But, swift as was the movement, the man was quicker. Crouching under the arc of the hurtling body, the Cro-Magnard drove his long knife to the hilt in the white-furred belly. The force of the leap, plus the power behind that strong right arm, tore a long, deep gash, and the animal fell, screaming with pain and hate. Quickly he regained his feet and again threw himself at the two-legged creature in his path. But Tharn easily avoided the charge and vaulted into a nearby tree.

Blood streamed from the fatally wounded leopard as it turned to the man's leafy haven and attempted to scramble into the lower branches. The effort cost Tarlok his remaining strength, however, and he toppled heavily to earth. Once more he sought to regain his feet, only to collapse and move no more.

As Tharn came down to the floor of the glade, he wondered why the scream of the giant cat had not brought enemy warriors running to the scene. That none had appeared made certain his belief that they were elsewhere in the neighborhood, and he breathed easier.

As soon as Tharn reappeared, the girl whose life he had saved rose from a clump of bushes a few feet away. And thus they stood there, each eyeing the other with frank interest.

THARN'S brain was awhirl. So much that was new and exciting had crowded into it within the last few hours that he was incapable of rational thinking. But this he knew: something had been born within him that had not been there an hour ago.

He spoke first. "I am Tharn," he said.

The girl did not at once respond to his implied question. She seemed hesitant, uncertain as to the wisdom of remaining there.

"I am Dylara," she said at last, her voice low and soft, yet wonderfully clear. "My father is chief of the tribe that bears his name. The caves of Majok are there," and she pointed toward the cliff, hidden from them by intervening trees.

Under the impetus of crystallizing realization, Tharn said what he had wanted to say from the first. "I kept Tarlok from getting you," he reminded her. "Now you belong to me!"

The brown-haired girl flushed with mingled astonishment and anger.

"You are a fool!" she retorted. "I belong to no one. Because you saved me from Tarlok, I will not call my people if you go away at once."

She turned and would have left him had not Tharn reached out and caught her by the arm.

Instantly she wheeled and struck him savagely across the mouth with her free hand, struggling to break his hold as she did so.

Then Tharn, his face smarting, hesitated no longer. With an effortless motion he drew her into the circle of his arms, tossed her lightly across one broad shoulder and broke into a run, heading back in the direction of home.

His prisoner let out a single cry for help; then a calloused palm covered her lips.

And hardly had the echoes of that shout faded than six brawny fighting-men rose from the edge of the jungle, directly in Tharn's path!

At sight of the newcomers, Tharn whirled to his left, and raced away with enormous bounding strides despite the handicap of his burden. With loud yells and frightful threats beating against his ears, the cave man vanished into the tangled maze beyond the clearing.

Pursuit was immediate. For several hundred yards the chase continued at break-neck speed. Compared to those behind him, Tharn's passage was almost silent, his lithe figure slipping smoothly among the tree trunks. And then into view came the shallow, swift-flowing stream which he had scented while still in the clearing. Dashing into the water he splashed rapidly upstream for a hundred yards, a sharp bend hiding him from the point at which he had entered.

Now he saw ahead of him that which he had hoped to find—the immense branch of a jungle giant, hanging low above the water's shimmering surface. Upon reaching the limb he drew himself and his captive into the leaves; then, stepping lightly from bough to bough, his balance controlled by a single hand, he moved rapidly inland, passing easily from tree to tree. Now and then he paused to listen for some indication of pursuit, but nothing reached those keen ears except the familiar sounds of a semi-tropical forest.

THARN was beginning to wonder what far-reaching effects this half-mad abduction would have on his future life. He tried to picture his father's face when he saw his son returning with a strange mate, and the image was not an altogether pleasant one. Taking a mate by force was not entirely uncommon among Cro-Magnon people, although he had heard the elder Tharn declare that no true man would do so. The Hairy Ones took their women in that fashion; but then they were hardly more than the beasts.

And Barkoo! Tharn shuddered at the thought of his teacher's reaction. He would say much—remarks that would sear the hide of Pandor, the elephant!

He shrugged mentally. Let them, then! Many would envy him his prize; for certainly none among the women of the tribe was half so fair. He hoped that between now and the time Dylara and he arrived home, she would prove more tractable. Were she to repulse him in front of the others . . . He dropped the thought as though it were white-hot.

An hour later he descended at the edge of a small natural clearing. A spring bubbled in one corner, and beside it the girl was lowered to her feet. The man and the girl knelt to drink, then sat up.

Tharn glanced at her, and grinned when she promptly turned her back. She was angrily rubbing her wrists to restore the circulation his strong grasp had partially cut off.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded, her head still turned away.

"To my caves and my tribe," Tharn replied. "You shall be my mate. Someday I shall be chief."

The quiet words brought the beautiful head quickly around, and the girl glared at him hotly.

"I would sooner mate with Gubo, the hyena!" she snapped.

Tharn's grin required effort. "I think not," he said calmly. "I will be good to you. You shall have the finest

skins to warm you, the best food to eat. Your cave will be large and light, and no one will tell you what to do. Except me, of course," he added slyly.

She searched wildly for a telling retort. "I—I hate you!"

Tharn met the angry eyes with a serenity he secretly was far from feeling.

"You will love me. I will make you love me," he assured her.

BY this time Dylara was so exasperated that she had almost forgotten her fright. What good did it do to argue with this headstrong youth? He turned back every command, every retort, with an unruffled aplomb that filled her with helpless fury. It was, she thought, like beating bare fists against a boulder. Angry tears welled up in her eyes, and she turned away, ashamed to show the extent of her agitation. Her father, she knew, would have warriors scouring the countryside in search of her. But how could they hope to follow a trail that led through the forest top? In all her life she had never heard of a man who used the pathway ordinarily reserved for little Nobar, the monkey. True, many of the tribesmen were accomplished tree-climbers, often ambushing game from their branches. But such climbing faded to nothingness when compared with this amazing man's superhuman agility and strength.

She stole a glance at his face. The broad, high forehead, the bronzed clean-scraped cheeks, the strong jaw and mobile, sensitive lips stirred something deep within her. She caught herself wishing she had met him under more favorable conditions. But, by taking her forcibly, he had turned her forever against him; she hated him with all the intensity of which she was capable.

And then, woman-like, her next words had nothing to do with her thoughts. "I am hungry," she said abruptly.

Tharn blinked at the abrupt change in the course of their conversation, but obediently he stood up.

"Then we shall eat," he assured her. "And it will be meat, too; I will show you that I am a great hunter."

It was a boast meant to impress. Dylara's lips twitched with amusement, but she said nothing.

Tharn raised his head, sniffed at the pungent jungle air, then set out through the trees, Dylara at his heels. Moving toward the east they came, a half hour later, to the banks of a narrow river. This they followed downstream until a game trail was reached.

Motioning for the girl to seek the concealing foliage of a tree, Tharn slipped behind the bole of another bordering the pathway. Drawing his knife, he froze into complete immobility.

Ten minutes, twenty—a half an hour dragged by. From her elevated position Dylara watched the young man, marveling at the indomitable patience that could keep him motionless, waiting. The strong lines of his body appealed vividly to her, although she was quick to insist it was entirely impersonal; she would have been as responsive, she told herself, had it been the figure of Sadu, the lion, crouching there.

Then—although she had heard nothing—she saw Tharn stiffen expectantly. Two full minutes passed. And then, stepping daintily, every sense alert for hidden danger, came sleek Bana—the deer.

Here was food fit for the mate of a chief! The man of the caves tightened his strong fingers about the knife hilt.

On came Bana. Tharn drew his legs beneath him like a great cat.

And then events followed one another in rapid sequence. As the unsuspecting animal drew abreast of him, Tharn, with a long, lithe bound, sprang full on its back, at the same instant driving the stone blade behind Bana's left foreleg and into the heart. The deer stumbled and fell. Dylara dropped from the tree, reaching Tharn's side as he rose from the body of the kill.

As he stood erect, still clutching the reddened blade, an arrow sped through the sunlight and raked a deep groove along his naked side.

At the shock of pain which followed, Tharn whirled about in a movement so rapid that his body seemed to blur. Before he could do more, however, a heavy wooden club flashed from a clump of undergrowth at his back, striking him a terrible blow aside the head. A searing white light seemed to explode before him; then blackness came and he knew no more.

CHAPTER III

The Strange City

DYLARA was first aware of a dull pain centering at the juncture of cheek and jaw. Half conscious, she put her fingers to the aching spot—and opened her eyes.

"How do you feel?" asked a man's deep voice.

Dylara, blinking in the strong sunlight, sat up. In front of her, squatted on his haunches before a small grass-fed fire, was a slender, wirily built man of uncertain age, his narrow hawklike face creased in a thin-lipped smile as he squinted at her.

"I don't . . . What—" Dylara began in a dazed voice.

The man fished a bit of scorched meat from the flames and bit off a mouthful. "The next time," he said thickly, "be careful whose face you scratch. Trokar doesn't make a habit of hitting girls, but you turned on him like a panther when he tried to keep you from running away. He'll carry the marks for a while!"

Memories flooded in on her. She saw the sun-dappled trail; saw Tharn rise from the body of Bana, only to go down under the cruel impact of a heavy club; saw the horde of oddly dressed men spring from concealment and rush toward her. She had turned to run, but a grinning warrior had intercepted her. And when she had raked her nails across his cheek, his good-humored expression had darkened — she remembered no more.

"But — but Tharn?" she cried. "Where is he? Did you—Is he—"

The man shrugged. "If you mean the man who was with you . . . well, we intended only to stun him. There is need in Sephar for strong slaves. But the club that brought him down was thrown too hard."

"Then he is—dead?"

The hawk-faced one nodded.

Dylara was too shocked to attempt analysis of her feelings. She knew only that an unbearable weight had come into her heart; beyond that her thoughts refused to go. Sudden tears stung her eyes.

THE man rose and set about stamping out the fire. Watching him, the girl began to note how greatly this man differed from one of her own tribe. To begin with, he was smaller, both in build and in stature. His skin, under its heavy tan, was somewhat darker; his hair very black. He wore a tunic of some coarsely woven grayish white material; rude sandals of deerskin covered his feet. A quiver of arrows and a bow—both completely unfamiliar ob-

jects to the girl—swung from his shoulders, and a long thin knife of flint was thrust under a belt of skin at his waist.

His speech, too, had shown he was of another race. While it had been intelligible, his enunciation was puzzling at times; occasionally hardly understandable. The similarity to the Cro-Magnon tongue was far stronger than basic; still, there was considerable difference in subtle shadings of pronunciation and sentence structure.

He turned to her, finally. "Are you hungry?"

"No," she said dully.

"Good. We have delayed too long, as it is. Sephar is more than two suns away, and we are anxious to return."

He raised his voice in a half-shouted, "Ho!" In response a half-score of men rose from the tall grasses nearby.

"Trokar," called the hawk-faced one.

"Yes, Vulcar." A slender young man came forward.

"Here is the girl who improved your looks! It will be your duty to look after her on the way back to Sephar."

Troker fingered three angry red welts along one cheek, and grinned without speaking.

In single file they set out toward the south. For several hours they pushed steadily ahead across gently rolling prairie land. The girl's spirits sagged lower and lower as she trudged on, going she knew not where. She thought of her father and the grief he must be suffering; of her friends and her people. She thought of Tharn once or twice; if he were alive, these men would not hold her for long. But he was dead, and the realization brought so strong a pang that she forced her thoughts away from him.

They camped that night at the edge of a great forest. All during the dark hours a heavy fire was kept going, while the men alternated, in pairs, at sentry duty. Several times during the night Dylara was awakened by hunting cries of roving meat-eaters but apparently none came near the camp.

All the following day the party of twelve skirted the edge of the forest, moving always due south. By evening the ground underfoot had become much more uneven, and hills began to appear frequently. The nearby jungle was thinning out, as well, and the air was noticeably cooler. Just at sunset they finished scaling a particularly steep incline and paused at the crest to camp for the night.

Not far to the south, Dylara saw a low range of mountains extending to the horizons. Narrow valleys cut between the peaks, none of the latter high enough to be snow-capped. Through one ravine tumbled the waters of a mountain stream. The fading sunlight, reflected from water and glistening rocks, gave the scene an aura of majestic magnificence, bringing an involuntary murmur of delight to the lips of the girl.

"Beyond those heights lies Sephar." It was Vulcar, he of the hawk face, who spoke from beside her.

Dylara glanced at him, seeing the great pride in his expression.

"Sephar?" she echoed questioningly.

"Home!" he said. "It is like nothing you have ever seen. We do not live in caves; we are beyond that. It is from tribes such as yours that we take our slaves. Long ago the people of Sephar and Ammad were such as you. But because they were greater and wiser, and learned many things which you of the caves do not know, we have come to think of your kind as little more than animals."

EARLY the following morning they were underway once more. Short-

ly before noon they scaled the last few yards to a great tableland among the peaks. And it was then that Dylara got her first glimpse of Sephar.

A little below where she stood was a wide, shallow valley, most of it filled with heavy forest and jungle. Directly in the center of this valley, a jewel in a setting of green, lay a city. A city of stone buildings, gray and box-like, erected in the most simple of architectural design. With a few exceptions, all buildings were of one story; none more than two. Broad, clean streets were much in evidence, the principal ones running spokewise to converge at the exact center of the wheel-like patten. Encircling all this was a great wall of dull gray stone.

But the most arresting feature of the entire city was situated at the hub of it all. Here, rising four full stories above the carefully tended plot of ground surrounding it, stood a tremendous structure of pure white stone, its shining walls adding materially to the dazzling effect given the awe-struck Dylara.

A hand touched her shoulder. Vulcar was smiling at her expression. "That," he said proudly, "is Sephar."

The girl could find no words to answer him. Here was something that all the tales repeated around a hundred cave-fires, during the rainy seasons, had never approached. Here might dwell the gods; those who sent the rain and the flaming bolts from the skies . . .

"Come," Vulcar said at last, and the little party started down the grass-covered incline toward the valley floor —and Sephar.

* * *

THE princess Alurna was angry. A few moments ago she had driven her slave woman from the room, hastening the girl's departure with a thrown vase. Raging, the princess paced the chamber's length, kicking the soft fur rugs from her path. Bed coverings were scattered about the floor, flung there during this —her latest—tantrum.

It is doubtful whether Alurna, herself, knew what brought on these savage fits of temper. Actually, it was boredom; life to the girl—still in her early twenties—went on in Sephar in the same uneventful fashion as it had since her great-great grandfather had led a host across the tremendous valley between the present site of Sephar and the nothern slopes of Ammad.

Finally the princess threw herself face down on the disordered bed and burst into hysterical weeping. She had about cried herself out, when a hand touched her arm.

"Go away, Anela!" she snapped, without looking up. "I told you to stay out until I sent for you."

"It is I," said a deep voice, "Urim, your father."

The girl scrambled hastily from the bed, at the same time wiping away the traces of tears.

"I'm sorry, father. I thought it was Anela, come back to look after me."

The man chuckled. "If I know anything, she won't be back until you fetch her. She is huddled in one corner of the hall outside, shaking as though Sadu had chased her!"

Despite his fifty years, Urim, ruler of Sephar, was still an imposing figure. Larger than the average Sepharian, he had retained much of the splendid physique an active life had given him. Of late years, however, he had been content to lead a more sedentary life; this, and a growing fondness for foods and wine, had added inches to his middle and fullness to his face, while mellowing still further a kindly disposition.

Alurna sat down on the edge of her bed and sought to tidy the cloud of

loosely bound dark curls framing her lovely head. She was taller, by an inch or two, than the average Sepharian girl, with a lithe, softly rounded figure, small firm breasts, rather delicate features and a clear olive skin. She was wearing a sleeveless tunic which fell from neck to knees, caught at the waist by a wide belt of the same material. Her shapely legs were bare, the feet encased in heelless sandals of leather.

Urim drew up a chair and sat down. He watched Alurna as she freshened her appearance, his face reflecting a father's pride.

"Come, child," he said at last. "It is time for the midday meal. And that brings out what I came to tell you."

Alurna glanced at him with quick interest. "I thought so! I can always tell when you've got some surprise for me. What is it this time?"

"Visitors," Urim replied. "Three noble-born young men have traveled from Ammad to pay their respects. They have brought gifts from your uncle—many of them for you!"

Visitors from the mother country were rare, since few elected to attempt the perilous journey to Sephar. Alurna's uncle was king in Ammad, and the two brothers were warm friends. Urim, himself, had been born in Ammad, having come to Sephar as ruler when the former king, old Pyron, had died childless. Alurna had never seen the city of her father's birth, having been born in Sephar.

WHEN Alurna had completed her toilet, she joined her father, and together they descended the broad central staircase of the palace to the lower hall. After passing through several well-furnished rooms, they entered a crowded dining hall and took seats at the head of a long table. The other diners had risen at their entry; they remained standing until Urim motioned for them to sit again.

Another group entered the hall, now, and all, save Urim and his daughter, rose to greet them. These newcomers were the visitors from Ammad, and as they approached vacant benches near the table's head, Urim stood to welcome them, his arms folded to signify friendship, a broad smile on his lips.

He turned to Alurna. "My daughter, welcome the friends of my brother. This is Tamar; this, Javan; and Jotan —my daughter, Alurna."

The girl smiled dutifully to the three. Two were of the usual type about her —slight, small-boned, graceful men with little to distinguish them.

But the other—Jotan—caught her attention from the first. He was truly big—standing a full six feet, with heavy broad shoulders and muscular arms and legs. His eyes were a cold flinty blue, deep-set in a strong masculine face. His jaw was square and firm, the recently scraped skin ruddy and clear. He carried himself with no hint of self-consciousness at being in the presence of royalty; his bearing as regal as that of Urim, himself.

One after the other the three visitors touched the princess' hand. Jotan, the last, held her fingers a trifle longer than was necessary, while his eyes flashed a look of admiration that turned red the girl's cheeks. She withdrew her hand abruptly, hiding her confusion by hurried speech.

"My father and I are happy that you have come to Sephar," she said. "Food shall be brought to refresh you after so long and tiring a journey."

At a sign from Urim, slaves began to fetch in steaming platters, placing them at frequent intervals along the board. Baked-clay cups were put at the right hand of each diner and filled with the wine-like beverage common to

Sephar and Ammad; an alcoholic drink fermented from a species of wild grape. Of utensils there was none, the hands serving to convey food to the mouth.

After spilling a few drops of wine to the floor as a tribute to the God-Whose-Name - May - Not - Be-Spoken-Aloud, each diner set about the business of eating.

AT LAST the mounds of viands had disappeared; the cups, drained and refilled many times during the course of the feast, were replenished again, and the Sepharians settled back to talk.

"Scarcely five marches from here, we were beset by a great band of cave-dwellers." Javan was speaking. "We beat them back easily enough; our bows and arrows evidently were unknown to them and sent scores to their deaths.

"But I tell you it was exciting for a time! They were huge brutes and unbelievably strong. Their spears—crude, barbaric things—were thrown with such force that twice I saw them go entirely through two of our men.

"But, as I say, we repulsed them, losing only four of our party, while over forty of the cave people died. We were not able to take prisoners; they fought too stubbornly to be subdued alive."

Alurna leaned forward eagerly.

"We have many slaves who once were such as you have described," she broke in. "But they do not take kindly to slavery. They often are morose and hate us, and need beatings to be kept in place. Yet their men are strong and fearless—and usually quite handsome."

From his place at the table, Jotan watched the face of the princess as she spoke. She seemed vivid and forceful —much more so that any other woman he had ever met; and her beauty of face and figure was breath-taking. He resolved to become better acquainted with her.

The manner in which Tamar straightened at her last words, showed they had stung him—just why, was not altogether clear to Alurna.

"They are only brutes—animals!" he said heatedly. "They know nothing of such splendor—" he waved an arm to include the room's rich furnishings "—no tables or chairs, no soft covers on their cave floors. There are no walls to protect them from raids by their enemies; no ability in warfare beyond blind courage. They are half-naked savages—nothing more!"

A sudden commotion at the doorway caused the conversation to end here. A short, alert man with a hawk-like face and a distinct military bearing, strode into the room and bowed before Urim.

"Well, Vulcar," greeted the king, without rising, "what are you doing here?"

"I come," replied the warrior, "to report the capture of a young cave-woman. A hunting party slew her mate and captured her a few marches from Sephar."

"Bring her in to us," Urim commanded. "I should like our visitors to see for themselves what cave people are like."

Vulcar bowed again, then returned to the doorway and beckoned to someone outside.

TWO Sepharian warriors entered, Dylara between them. She was disheveled and rumpled, the protecting skin of Jalok, the panther, was awry; but her head was unbowed, her shoulders erect, and her glance as haughty as that of the princess, Alurna, herself.

No one said anything for a long moment. The sheer beauty of the girl captive seemingly had struck them dumb.

Jotan broke the silence. "By the God!" he gasped. "Are you jesting? This is no half-wild savage!"

Alurna, her eyes flashing dangerously, turned toward the speaker. The first man ever to attract her, and already raving over some unwashed barbarian who soon was to be a common slave!

"Perhaps you would like to have her as your mate," she said sweetly, but with an ominous note in her tone.

Urim shot a startled glance at his daughter. He had heard that edge to her voice before this, and usually it meant trouble for someone.

Jotan kept his eyes on the prisoner. "She would grace the life of any man," he declared with enthusiasm, totally unaware of Alurna's mounting jealousy.

Tamar, seated next to Jotan, forced a loud laugh. "My friend loves to jest," he announced in a palpable attempt to break the sudden tension. "Pay no attention to him."

Although Dylara understood most of what was being said, she was too upset to follow the conversation itself. She was awed and a little frightened by the undreamed-of magnificence about her. As much as she had hated Tharn, being with him was far better than belonging to those who had her now. But Tharn was dead, stricken down by a slender stick and heavy club.

"Take her to the slave quarters," instructed Urim finally. "Later, I shall decide what is to be done with her."

Dylara was led up two broad flights of stairs and deep within the left wing of the palace, her escort halting at last before massive twin doors. Here, two armed guards raised a heavy timber from its sockets, the doors swung wide, and she was led down a long hall past several small doors on either side of the corridor.

The men stopped before one of these doors, unbarred it, and thrust Dylara into the room beyond. Then the door closed and she heard the bar drop into place.

AT FIRST, her eyes were hard put to distinguish objects in the faint light entering through a long narrow, stone-barred opening set high up close to the ceiling. Soon, however, she was able to make out the simple furnishings: a low bed, formed by hairy pelts on a wooden framework; a low bench; a stand, upon which were a large clay bowl and a length of clean, rough cloth; and, on the floor, a soft rug of some woven material unfamiliar to the cave-girl.

Utterly weary, the girl threw herself on the bed. Thoughts of Tharn came unbidden to her mind. How she longed for his confidence-instilling presence! Not that she cared for him in any way; of that she was very certain. It was only that he was one of her own kind; he spoke as she did, clothed himself as she was accustomed to seeing men clothed.

It was unthinkable that he was dead; impossible to believe that that mighty heart had ceased to beat! Yet she had heard the dull impact of wood against bone as the club had felled him, and he had not stirred when the strange men broke from the bushes to seize her.

Yes, he was dead; and Dylara's eyes suddenly brimmed with burning tears. She told herself that her sorrow was not so much from his death as the fact that, without him alive, she could never hope to leave this place.

The show of bravado, maintained before her captors, began to slip away. She was so lonely and afraid here in this grimly beautiful city. What would become of her? And that proud, lovely girl at the table with all those people—why had she looked at Dylara with such frank hatred?

She cried a little, there in the dim light, and still sobbing, fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

Came Tharn

SADU, the lion, rounding a bend in the trail, came to an abrupt halt as his eyes fell on the carcass of Bana lying across the path a few yards ahead

An idle breeze ruffled his heavy mane as he stood there, one great paw half-lifted as though caught in mid-stride. Then, very slowly, impelled solely by curiosity, he moved toward the dead animal.

Suddenly something stirred beyond the bulk of the deer. Sadu froze to immobility again as the dusty blood-stained figure of a half-naked man got to an upright position and faced him.

For a full minute the man and the lion stared woodenly into each other's eyes, across a space of hardly more than a dozen paces.

Sadu's principal emotion was puzzled uncertainty. There was nothing of menace in the attitude of this two-legged creature; neither did it show any indication of being alarmed. Experience had taught the lion to expect one or the other of those reactions upon such meetings as this, and the absence of either was responsible for his own indecision.

As for Tharn, he was experiencing difficulty in seeing clearly. The figure of the giant cat seemed to shimmer in the sunlight; to expand awesomely, then contract almost to nothing. A whirlpool of roaring pain sucked at his mind, drawing the strength from every muscle of his body.

Tharn realized the moment was fast approaching when either he or Sadu must make some move. If the lion's decision was to attack, the empty-handed cave-man would prove easy prey.

Almost at Tharn's feet lay his heavy war-spear. To stoop to retrieve it might precipitate an immediate charge. But that might come anyway, he reasoned, catching him without means of defence.

What followed required only seconds. Tharn crouched, caught up the flint-tipped weapon, and straightened—all in one supple motion. Sadu slid back on his haunches, reared up with fore-legs extended, gave one mighty roar—then turned and in wild flight vanished into the jungle!

It required the better part of an hour for the cave lord to hack a supply of meat from Bana's flank and cache it in a high fork of the nearest tree. The blow from a Sepharian war-club had resulted in a nasty concussion and the constant waves of dizziness and nausea made his movements slow and uncertain.

For two full days he lay on a rude platform of branches in that tree, most of the time in semi-stupor. Twice in that time he risked descent for water from the nearby river.

IT WAS not until morning of the third day that he awoke comparatively clear-headed. For a little while he raced through the branches of neighboring trees, testing the extent of his recovery. And when he discovered that, beyond a dull ache in one side of his head, he was himself once more, he ate the remainder of his stock of deer meat and came down to the trail to pick up the two-day-spoor of Dylara's captors.

That those who had struck him down had also taken his intended mate, Tharn never doubted. She—and he!—had been too well ambushed for escape. What her fate would be after capture

depended upon the identity of her abductors.

But when Tharn had picked up those traces not obliterated by the movements of jungle denizens during the two days, he was as much in the dark as before. Never in his own considerable experience had he come upon the prints of sandals before this; nor had he known of a tribe who wore coverings on their feet.

He shrugged. After all, *who* had taken Dylara was beside the point. She had been taken; and he must follow, to rescue her if she were still alive—for vengeance if they had slain her.

By noon of the next day Tharn was drawing himself up to the edge of the tableland at almost the same spot from whence Dylara had her first glimpse of Sephar. And when he rose to his feet and saw the city of stone and its great circular wall, he was no less electrified than the girl had been. He, however, felt no dread at the prospect of entering; indeed, his adventurous blood urged him to waste no time in doing so.

As he raced through the trees toward Sephar, his thoughts were of Dylara. Reason insisted that she still lived—a captive behind that grim stone wall. He knew, now, that his love for her was no temporary madness, but an emotion that would rule his life until death claimed him. Her proud, slender figure with its scanty covering of panther skin rose unbidden before him, and he felt a sudden uncomfortable tightness where ribs and belly met. Love was teaching Tharn of other aches than physical bruises . . .

It was mid-afternoon when he reached the forest's edge nearest to Sephar. Several hundred yards of level open ground lay between the trees and the mighty wall, which evidently encircled the entire city.

From where he crouched on a strong branch high above the ground, he saw two wide gateways not more than fifty yards apart, both of them guarded by parties of armed men. His keen eyes picked out details of their figures and clothing, both of which excited his keenest interest. With its entrances so closely guarded it would be folly to approach closer during the day. While impatient to reach Dylara's side, he was quite aware that any attempt at rescue now would doubtless cost him his own freedom, if not his life, thereby taking from the girl her only hope of escape. He must wait for night to come, hoping the guards would then be withdrawn.

REMINDED that he had not eaten since early morning, Tharn swung back through the trees in search of meat. The plains of this valley appeared to abound with grass-eaters; and not long after, a wild horse fell before his careful stalking. Squatting on the body of his kill, he gorged himself on raw flesh, unwilling to chance some unfriendly eye noticing smoke from a fire.

His appetite cared for, the cave-man bathed in the waters of a small stream. He then knelt on the bank, and using the water as a mirror, cut the sprouting beard from his face by means of a small, very sharp bit of flint taken from a pouch of his loin-cloth. Comfort, rather than vanity, was responsible; a bearded face increased the discomfort of a tropical day.

The sun was low in the west by the time he had returned to his former vantage point, and shortly afterward the heavy wooden gates were pulled shut by their guards, who then withdrew into the city.

Now, the grounds about Sephar were deserted, and soon the sun slipped behind the far horizon. Swiftly twilight gave way to darkness, and stars began

to glow softly against the bosom of a clear semi-tropical night.

Two hours—three—went by and still Tharn did not leave his station. Somewhere below him an unidentified animal crashed noisily through the thick undergrowth and moved deeper into the black shadows. Far back in the forest a panther screamed shrilly once and was still; to be answered promptly by the thunderous challenge of Sadu, the lion.

Finally the giant white man rose to his feet on the swaying branch and leisurely stretched. Silently and swiftly he slipped to the ground. He paused there for a moment, ears and nose alert for an indication of danger, then set out across the level field toward the towering wall of Sephar—enigmatic city of mystery and peril.

* * *

AFTER Vulcar had led the captive cave-girl from the dining room, a general discussion sprang up. Any reference to the cave people, however, was carefully avoided; the subject, for some reason that nobody quite understood, seemed suddenly taboo.

While the others were rapidly drinking themselves into a drunken stupor, Jotan sat as one apart, head bowed in thought. He found it impossible to dismiss the impression given him by the half-naked girl of the caves. She was so different from the usual girl with whom he came in contact—more vital, more alive. There was nothing fragile or clinging about her. He could not help but compare that fine, healthy, well-rounded figure with the pallid, artificial women of his acquaintance. Her clean sparkling eyes, clear tanned skin and graceful posture made those others seem dull and uninviting.

"Jotan!"

The visitor came back to his surroundings with a start.

Urim, his round face flushed from much wine, had called his name.

"Come, man," he laughed, "of what do you dream? A girl in far-off Ammad, perhaps?"

Jotan reddened, but replied calmly enough, "No, my king; no flower of *Ammad* holds my heart."

The faint stress he placed on the name of his own country passed unnoticed by all except Alurna.

"'Of Ammad,' you say, Jotan," she cut in. "Perhaps so soon you have found love here in Sephar."

The remark struck too close to home for the man's comfort.

"You read strange meanings in my words, my princess," he said evasively; then suddenly he thrust back his bench and arose.

"O Urim," he said, "my friends and I would like to look about Sephar. Also, if you will have someone show us the quarters we are to use during our visit . . ."

"Of course," Urim agreed heartily. "The captain of my own guards shall act as your guide."

Vulcar was sent for. When he arrived, Urim bade him heed every wish the three guests might express.

As they passed from the palace into the street beyond, Tamar said softly:

"Whatever possessed you, Jotan, to say such things where others could hear you? A noble of Ammad, raving about some half-clad barbarian girl! What must they think of you!"

Jotan was midway between laughter and anger. Tamar's reaction had been so typical, however, that he checked an angry retort. Tamar was so completely the snob, so entirely conscious of class distinction, that his present attitude was not surprising.

"It might be interesting," he admitted.

Tamar was puzzled. "What might?"

"To know what they think."

Tamar sniffed audibly, and moved away to join Javan.

THEY spent the balance of the afternoon walking about Sephar's streets, viewing the sights. Shortly before dusk Vulcar led them to their quarters in a large building near the juncture of two streets—a building with square windows barred by slender columns of stone. Slaves brought food; and after the three men had eaten, the room was cleared that they might sleep.

Jotan yawned. "Even my bones are weary," he said. "I'm going to bed."

Tamar stood up abruptly. He had been silently rehearsing a certain speech all afternoon, and he was determined to have his say.

"Wait, Jotan," he said. "I'd like to talk to you, first."

Jotan looked at his friend with mock surprise. He knew perfectly well what was coming, and he rather welcomed this opportunity to declare himself and, later, to enlist the aid of his friends.

Javan was regarding them with mild amazement on his good-natured, rather stupid face. He was the least aggressive of the three, usually content to follow the lead of the others.

"All right," Jotan said. "I'm listening."

"I suppose the whole thing doesn't really amount to much." Tamar forced a laugh. "But I think it was wrong for you to carry on the way you did over that cave-girl today. Only the God knows what the nobles of Sephar, and Urim and his daughter, thought of your remarks. Why, anyone would have thought you had fallen in love with the girl!"

Jotan smiled—a slow, easy smile. "I have!" he said.

Tamar stiffened as though he had been struck. His face darkened. "No! Jotan, do you know what you're saying? A naked wild creature in an animal skin! You talk like a fool!

"Javan!" He whirled on the silent one. "Javan, are you going to sit there and let this happen? Help me reason with this madman."

Javan sat with mouth agape. "But I—why—what—"

Jotan leaned back and sighed. "Listen, Tamar," he said placatingly. "We have been friends too long to quarrel over my taste in choosing a mate. Tomorrow I shall ask Urim for the girl."

"Your *mate?* I might have known it." In his agitation Tamar began to pace the floor. "We should have stayed in Ammad. I have a good mind to go to Urim and plead with him not to give her to you."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Tamar," Jotan said quietly. He was no longer smiling. "I will not permit you to interfere in this. This girl is to be my mate. You, as my friend, will help me."

Tamar snorted. "When our friends see her, see her as the mate of noble Jotan, you will wish that I *had* interfered. A dirty half-wild savage! You will be laughed at, my friend, and the ridicule will soon end your infatuation."

Jotan looked at him with level eyes. "You've said enough, Tamar. Understand this: Tomorrow I shall ask Urim for the cave girl. Now I am going to sleep."

Tamar shrugged and silently turned away. Amidst a deep silence the three men spread their sleeping-furs, extinguished the candles and turned in.

* * *

AS Tharn neared Sephar's outer wall, Uda, the moon, pushed her shining edge above the trees, causing the

Cro-Magnon to increase his pace lest he be seen by some observer from within the city.

He reached the dense shadows of the wall directly in front of one mighty gateway, its barrier of heavy planks seemingly as solid as the stone wall on either side.

Tharn pressed an ear to a crack of the wood. He could hear nothing from beyond. Bending slightly forward, he dug his bare feet into the ground, placed one broad shoulder against the rough surface, and pushed. At first the pressure was gentle; but when the gate did not give, he gradually increased the force until all his superhuman strength strove to loosen the barrier.

But the stubborn wood refused to give way, and Tharn realized he must find another means of entry.

A single glance was enough to convince him that the rim of the wall was beyond leaping distance. It was beginning to dawn on the cave-man that getting into this strange lair was not to be so easy as he had at first expected.

He concluded finally that there was nothing left to do but circle the entire wall in hopes that some way to enter would show itself. Perhaps one of the several gates would have been left carelessly ajar, although he was not trusting enough to have much faith in that possibility.

After covering possibly half a mile, and testing two other gateways without success, his sharp gray eyes spied a broken timber near the top of the wall directly above one of the gates. An end of the plank protruded a foot beyond the sheer surface of rock.

Tharn grinned. Those within might as well have left the gate itself open. Drawing the grass rope from his shoulders, he formed a slip knot at one end, and with his first effort managed to cast the loop about the jagged bit of wood. This done, it was a simple matter to draw himself up to the timber. There he paused to restore the rope about his shoulders, then he cautiously poked his head over the wall and peered into the strange world below.

There was no one in sight. Still smiling confidently, keenly aware that he might never leave this place alive, he lowered himself over the edge, swung momentarily by his hands, then dropped soundlessly to the street below. The first obstacle in the search for Dylara had been overcome.

* * *

SLOWLY and without sound the massive door to Dylara's room swung open, permitting a heavily-laden figure to enter. Placing its burden on the table, the figure closed the door, crossed to the side of the sleeping girl and bent above her, listening to the slow even breathing. Satisfied, the visitor stepped back to the table and, with a coal from an earthen container, ignited the wicks of dishes of animal fat. The soft light revealed the newcomer as a woman.

Quietly she arranged the dishes she had brought, using the low stand as a table. That done, she came to Dylara's side and shook her gently by a shoulder.

The daughter of Majok awakened with a start, blinking the sleep from her eyes. At sight of the other, she sat up in quick alarm.

The woman smiled reassuringly. "You must not be afraid," she said softly. "I am your friend. They sent me here with food for you. See?" She pointed to the dishes.

The words brought a measure of comfort to Dylara's troubled mind. She noticed this woman's speech had

in it nothing of the strange accent peculiar to Sephar's inhabitants.

"Who are you?" Dylara asked.

"I am Nada—a slave."

The girl nodded. Who was it this woman reminded her of? "I am Dylara, Nada. Tell me, why is it you speak as do the cave people?"

"I am of the cave people," replied the woman. "There are many of us here. The mountains about Sephar contain the caves of many tribes. Often Sephar's warriors make war on our people and carry many away to become slaves."

Dylara watched her as she spoke. Despite a youthful appearance, she must have been twice the cave-girl's age; about the same height but more fully developed. Her figure, under the simple tunic, was beautifully proportioned; her face the loveliest Dylara had ever seen. There was an indefinable air of breeding and poise in her manner, softened by warm brown eyes and an expression of sympathetic understanding.

Nada endured the close appraisal without self-consciousness. Finally she said: "You must be hungry. Come; sit here and eat."

Dylara obeyed without further urging. Nada watched her in silence until the girl's appetite had been dulled, then said: "How did they happen to get you?"

Dylara told her, briefly. For some obscure reason she could not bring herself to mention Tharn by name. Just the thought of him, falling beneath a Sepharian club, brought a sharp ache to her throat.

THERE was a far-away expression in Nada's eyes as Dylara finished her story. "I knew a warrior once—one very much like the young man who took you from your father's caves. He was a mighty chief—and my mate. Many summers ago I was captured near our caves as I walked at the jungle's edge. A war party from a strange tribe had crept close to our caves during the night, planning to raid us at dawn. They seized me; but my cries aroused my people, and the war party fled, taking me with them. They lost their way in the darkness, and after many weary marches stumbled across a hunting party from Sephar. In the fight that followed they killed almost all of us, sparing only three—and me. I have been here ever since."

Dylara caught the undercurrent of utter hopelessness in the woman's words, and she felt a sudden rush of sympathy well up within her.

"Tharn was a chief's son," she said. "Had he lived, I am sure he—" She stopped there, stricken into silence by the horror on Nada's face.

The slave woman rose unsteadily from the bed and seized Dylara's hands.

"Tharn—did you say *Tharn?*"

The girl, shocked by the pain and grief in the face of the woman, could only nod.

"He—is—dead?"

Again Dylara nodded.

Nada swayed and would have fallen had not Dylara held tightly to her wrists. Tears began to squeeze from her closed eyes, to trickle down the drawn white cheeks.

And then Dylara found her voice. "What is it, Nada? What is wrong?"

The woman swallowed with an effort, fighting for control. "I," she whispered, "am Tharn's mate!"

At first, Dylara thought she meant he whom the Sepharians had slain. And then the truth came to her.

The Tharn she had known was Nada's son!

Impulsively she drew the woman down beside her, holding her tightly

until the tearing sobs subsided. For a little while there was silence within the room.

Without changing her position, Nada began to speak. "It was my son who was with you. Twelve summers before my capture I bore him; his father gave him his own name. And now he is dead. He is dead."

A draft of air from the window above caused the candle flame to waver, setting the shadows dancing.

Nada sat up and dried her eyes. "I will not cry any more," she said quietly. "Let us talk of other things."

Dylara pressed her hand in quick understanding. "Of course. Tell me, Nada, what will happen to me in Sephar?"

"You are a slave," Nada replied, "and belong to Urim, whose own warriors captured you. Perhaps you will be given certain duties in the palace, or the mate or daughter of some noble may ask for you as a handmaiden. As a rule they treat us kindly; but if we are troublesome they whip us, or sometimes give us to the priests. That is the worst of all."

"They have gods, then?" Dylara asked.

"Only one, who is both good and evil. If they fall in battle, He has caused it; if they come through untouched, He has helped them."

The Cro-Magnon girl could not grasp this strange contradiction, for she knew certain gods sought to destroy man, while other gods tried to protect him . . .

"Then I must spend the rest of my life as a slave?" she asked.

"Yes—unless some free man asks for you as a mate. And that may happen because you are very beautiful."

The girl shook her head. "I do not want that," she declared. "I want only to return to my father and people."

"It will be best," Nada said, "to give up that foolish dream. Sometimes cave-men escape from Sephar; the women, never."

She rose, saying: "I must leave you now. The guards will be wondering what has kept me. Tomorrow I will come again."

The two embraced. "Farewell, Nada," whispered the girl. "I shall try to sleep again. Being here does not seem so bad, now that I know you."

* * *

THARN regained his feet quickly after the drop from the wall, and looked about. Failing to detect any cause for immediate alarm, he set out along a broad street, hugging the buildings and keeping well within the shadows. The moon was quite high by now, the strong light flooding the deserted streets and bringing every object into bold relief.

The man of the caves did not have the slightest idea as to how he might locate the girl he loved; he proposed, however, to pit his wit and cunning, together with the stone knife and grass rope against the entire city, if necessary, until he stumbled across a clue of some sort that would bring them together. How he expected to snatch Dylara from her captors and win through to the forest and plains he did not stop to consider—time enough for that when she was found.

Abruptly the street along which he was moving ended, crossed here by another roadway. Down this side street a few yards, and on the opposite side, a huge stone building loomed, its windows barred by slender columns of stone. To Tharn's inexperienced eyes this appeared to be a prison of some sort; and as it was the first of its kind he had noticed, he decided to investigate—that is, if a means of entry could be found. The hope that Dylara might be held be-

hind one of those protected windows spurred him on.

Nonchalantly the mighty figure stepped from the sheltering shadows and leisurely crossed the street. He did not wish to excite suspicion, should any chance onlooker see him, by a sudden dash. Reaching the doorway of the edifice, he glanced sharply about; from all appearances he might have been in a city of the dead.

Delicate fingers, backed by a shrewd, imaginative mind, found the rude wooden latch, and solved its method of operation. Gently he pushed against the door and, not without surprise, felt it yield. Slowly the heavy planks swung inward until a space sufficient to admit his massive frame appeared, then he slid in and closed the door with his back.

The darkness was that of Acheron's pit; his eyes, keen as those of any jungle cat, were helpless to penetrate the blackness through which he moved with infinite stealth, arms outthrust before him, the cool hilt of his flint knife clutched in one muscular hand.

His nose warned him that there were men nearby; but the strangeness of his surroundings confused him as to their actual position.

One step forward he took—another, and yet another; then he trod full on the fingers of an outstretched hand!

CHAPTER V

Pursuit

THE instant Tharn felt his foot press the unseen hand he wheeled soundlessly and sprang to the door. Closing his fingers about the latch, he stood there, waiting. To rush out now would be certain to awaken the disturbed sleeper; otherwise the man might blame the mishap on one of his companions and go back to sleep without investigating further.

He heard a stirring in the darkness.

"Jotan."

In the utter darkness of the room the single word sounded loud as a thunder-clap.

"Jotan," said the voice again.

"Uh?" came an answering grunt.

"Are you awake?"

"I wasn't—until you woke me," said Jotan testily.

"I think somebody stepped on my fingers," the first voice said. "They feel like it, anyway."

"You must have rolled over on them, Javan. Go back to sleep."

Tharn followed the conversation with interest, surprised that he could understand the words. He waited patiently and without panic for the speakers to act or to return to sleep.

"I tell you, my hand was stepped on," Javan insisted.

"What are you two talking about?" broke in a third voice.

"Javan claims someone has been walking on him," explained Jotan. "Make a light; he'll not sleep until we search the place."

Tharn heard one of the men rise and fumble about in a corner of the room. Suddenly a flame sputtered and took hold, lighting the room's interior with a feeble glow.

Waiting no longer, Tharn twisted the latch and tried to draw open the door. But something had gone wrong; he could not stir the heavy planks.

"There!" Javan shouted. "At the door! Didn't I tell—"

With a bound Jotan leaped from his bed and plunged forward, catching Tharn at the knees. The cave-man braced himself, then bent and grasped his attacker about the waist.

Jotan was a strong, agile man. As a rough-and-tumble fighter he had few equals. But when the arms of the in-

truder encircled his body and tore away his hold as though he were a child, he knew he stood no chance.

The Sepharian gasped aloud as he felt himself swung aloft. He had a swift glimpse of the awe-stricken faces of his friends; then his flying body hurtled across the room to crash against them with sickening force, sending all three to the floor, half-stunned.

Tharn seized the door-latch once more and surged back with all his strength. There followed the sound of splintering wood as latch, bolt and strike were torn away. A second later he had gained the street.

BY the time those within were ready to attempt pursuit, the cave-man was a block away, running with the long easy strides of a trained athlete.

As he ran, Tharn drew his knife for any misguided person who might wish to bar his path. He was slowly drawing away from his shouting pursuers, when he caught sight of a second group of warriors not far ahead and coming at a run toward him.

Turning sharply into a side street, Tharn dashed on for a short distance, only to pull up short. The roadway ended here, nor were there streets on either side. Behind him the Sepharians had turnd the corner and were bearing down upon him.

Tharn was no stranger to danger or sudden death. Life in the jungles and on the vast plains had little else to offer. Fear and panic were not likely to prolong life; Tharn knew not the meaning of either.

And so it was, that as the angry fighting-men rushed toward him, they were to find no terror-stricken creature at bay. Indeed, so savage was the bearing of their quarry that the Sepharians hesitated, then came to a full stop a few paces away.

They were many, at least a score, but the sight of the Cro-Magnon's brawny frame and rippling muscles gave a dubious aspect to the whole affair; nor was the stone knife in one powerful hand a matter to be lightly dismissed.

It was during this brief armistice that one Lukor, awakened by the tumult outside his windows opened the door of his home with the ill-advised intention of making an investigation.

"I am surprised—" he began; but an instant later he was infinitely more surprised when the impact of a naked shoulder into his stomach flung him against the far corner of the room.

Tharn's jungle-trained ears had caught the sound of a bar being lifted, and so swiftly had he acted that the door was slammed shut and the bar replaced before Jotan, first to recover, could send hs weight crashing against the planks.

The moonlight filtering through the latticed windows revealed an open doorway in the opposite wall, and Tharn passed into an inner room. There were no windows here, and he stumbled over various furnishings before he came upon a rude staircase.

Taking three at a time, he bounded up the steps to the chamber above. Below he could hear the impact of bodies against the lattice-work of the windows. His enemies were getting no aid from the dazed Lukor; he had not yet regained his breath or his courage.

Without hesitation, Tharn crossed the room to its single large window and looked down. He was just in time to see the curtain of branches at the window beneath give way and man after man clamber through.

They did not all go in, however; five armed guards took up positions in the street. The Cro-Magnon had hoped to drop to the street as soon as the coast was clear, but now that avenue of es-

cape was closed.

SOMETHING must be done, and quickly, Tharn realized, were he to outwit those whose feet were even now pounding on the stairs. Thrusting head and shoulders out the window, he looked up and saw, a few feet away, the roof's edge.

Quickly Tharn balanced himself on the narrow sill, his back to the street. Raising to his tip-toes he reached gingerly up. His finger tips were a full six inches short of the roof's edge!

A lone chance remained: he must jump for it. To fail would plummet him to the street below — to certain capture and possible injury. The sinews of his legs tensed; then he rose upward in a cat-like leap.

There was a second of breathless uncertainty; then his fingers closed on a flat stone surface.

Barely had the dangling feet cleared the upper edge of the aperture when the horde burst through the doorway. Finding no occupant, they dashed to the window and called to the watchers below, only to learn the forest-man had not re-entered the street. A thorough search of the room convinced them the man they sought had left the building, and they blamed the men below for having permitted his escape; in turn to be jeered at as cowards for not searching Lukor's premises more carefully.

It was a puzzled crowd of disgruntled warriors that finally gave up the hunt. Some of the more superstitious were inclined to believe it was no human they sought—an evil spirit, perhaps, that had faded back into nothingness.

While a block away, Tharn, having fled from one roof to another, dropped easily to earth and set out for the huge white palace he had glimpsed from the house-tops.

THE Princess Alurna was finding it impossible to sleep. For hours she had lain wide-eyed, tossing fitfully, seeking the rest that would not come. Before her mind's eye persisted the image of Jotan as she had first seen him; in her ears were the sound of his voice and the echo of his laugh.

Why must her thoughts stay with this handsome visitor? Had her imperious heart given way at last?

She tried to thrust out the idea, to submerge it beneath a wave of derision; but to no avail. The image prevailed, calling attention to a splendid body and compelling features.

Finally she rose and went to the low wide window. Kneeling there she rested her arms on the broad sill, looking out over the sleeping streets and buildings, silent and brooding beneath the moon's splendor. Far out beyond the walls surrounding Sephar she could see the dark primeval forest, and she shivered a little although the night was warm. Faintly to her ears, across the stillness came the distant challenge of a lion. Again she shuddered, and brought her gaze back to Sephar's streets. The minutes passed slowly . . .

Suddenly she half rose in surprise as the almost naked figure of a man bounded from the shadows of a building across from the palace, and, entering the grounds, passed from sight somewhere below.

What did it mean? Was a resident of Sephar entering the palace for some mysterious reason of his own? Hardly. None would be so rash. Then, too, the figure had not been clad in the short tunic, usual dress of all Sepharians.

No; that shadowy figure meant danger. Jumping to her feet she ran to the door and flung it open. At her appearance the two warriors in the corridor sprang hastily forward.

"Get Vulcar at once," she cried.

"Someone is trying to get into the palace!"

* * *

THE moon's liquid rays did not reach the palace wall where Tharn was standing now. The white, smooth stone gleamed dully in the half light.

Moving as only the jungle-wise can move, he began to skirt the building, seeking an opening large enough to admit his giant frame. His bare feet were soundless on the grass; he was but a white shadow of a man.

There was no scarcity of windows, but all were barred by slender columns of stone. To attempt to force them would be a noisy method at best. If he meant to find and rescue Dylara he must resort to stealth and cunning alone. For all his herculean strength he would be helpless against an entire city.

He was nearing one corner of the building when his eyes caught sight of a narrow slit-like break in the stone just above the level of his head. There was no indication of bars, and as it appeared large enough to admit him, he caught the lip and drew himself up and within.

The awful stench that smote his nostrils nearly drove him back to the ground. He had no way of knowing, of course, that he had stumbled across a refuse chute; it was from this vent that waste was thrown into containers below.

Holding his breath, he clambered a short distance along the sloping stone, thrust away a wooden screen and stood upright.

He was in complete darkness. Moving slowly forward, his outthrust hands struck a wooden panel which proved to be a door. A second later he had solved the latch and stepped through.

Here, light came through several windows. He was in the palace kitchens, although his limited experience did not enable him to identify them as such. Across the room was a closed door; he directed his steps toward it.

Silently the door swung open, and the cave-man paused on the threshold of a large room, occupied by a massive table and numerous backless stools.

Tharn took in all that with a single swift glance. Something was moving beyond the hangings screening off the room ahead.

The curtains parted and five guardsmen filed into the room. After glancing hastily about, they passed silently through to the kitchens.

As the last one disappeared from view, a disembodied shape merged from beneath the long table and vanished into the room beyond.

Aside from its furnishings it, too, was empty.

ON WENT Tharn, combing each successive chamber for a sign of human life. He was determined not to quit this place until completely satisfied Dylara was held elsewhere. The task, not easy at best, would prove even more difficult with the palace guards on the lookout for an intruder.

Stronger by the minute was the realization that this strange race of people, who were capable of erecting their own caves of stone, who could make strange weapons to throw tiny spears with unbelievable accuracy, whose hands could shape such a variety of articles—were sadly lacking in the qualities without which Tharn could never have arrived at young manhood.

That five men could pass at arm's length from him and yet remain unaware of his nearness, was inconceivable to the man of the caves. Were their noses ornaments, he wondered, that they could not sense a hidden foe? Were their wits so dull they could pass up so obvious a hiding place as he had chosen?

No wonder that they had erected a great wall between them and the jungle! His lip curled with contempt as he pictured an army of them scattering before the charge of Sadu.

By this time he had reached the great hall inside the palace main entrance. A giant skylight high up in the ceiling, its cover removed during the dry season, admitted cold moonlight in a brilliant cascade of light that left no shadows or darkened corners.

From the center of the vast hall rose a gigantic staircase of stone to the second floor. Tharn, reasoning that the palace sleeping quarters would be above, stole warily toward the stairway.

And then a horde of armed men broke unexpectedly from a doorway across the hall, and spying Tharn, bore down upon him, uttering a chorus of exultant yells as they came.

One tremendous bound brought Tharn to the steps, up which he fled with all the speed of Jalok, the panther. Three spears hurled with senseless enthusiasm, fell short of their intended mark. But the shouts of alarm and excitement were fast arousing other inhabitants of the building. From somewhere above, Tharn heard a door slam, followed by the sound of running feet in the upper corridor to his left. Hence the moment he reached the landing he turned right and raced along the still deserted hallway, his naked feet soundless on the bare stone.

Because of the fugitive's silent approach, four guards, who stood facing in the opposite direction, did not hear him as he rounded a turn of the corridor and came toward them. At sight of those backs, Tharn slid to a stop and turned to retrace his steps.

Again he halted. To his quick ears came sounds of footsteps from the hall he had just left. With retreat cut off from both sides, he had but one chance for escape.

Choosing at random one of several doors on either side of the corridor, Tharn pushed it open, and still keeping an eye on the men outside, slipped within a softly lighted room. After gently closing the door, he turned—to stare into the startled eyes of the princess Alurna!

THARN'S first thought was that the girl would cry out in terror at his sudden entrance. Before she could recover her wits he had grasped her about the waist with one arm, at the same time clapping a hand across her lips.

Alurna lay within the circle of that mighty arm, making no effort to free herself. She was desperately afraid, more afraid than she could remember before.

The cave-man found himself on the horns of a dilemma. He had no wish to slay a woman; indeed he knew he could not, no matter what the provocation. On the other hand, were he to free her, she could have the guards here within seconds.

Their eyes met. Tharn was surprised that all trace of fear was masked within the cool gray-green depths, although the rapid pounding of her heart told him she was frightened.

Revealed to him with the quick intuition of a wild creature was something of this girl's true nature. He sensed she could be coldly calculating; that neither qualm nor principle would keep her from furthering her own ends. That, given the chance, she would betray him, he never doubted; but something told him she would never be driven to a rash act through ungovernable hysteria alone.

He removed his hand from her mouth, but held it ready to silence her again.

"What," whispered Alurna, "do you want here?"

Tharn shook his head. Any discussion, now, would be pointless. He must go on. At the far end of the room was a large unbarred opening—a possible avenue of escape.

Hesitating no longer he released the girl, pushed her aside and made for the window.

Alurna, confident now that this nocturnal prowler meant her no harm, remained standing where he had left her. While awaiting his next move, she fell to studying him from across the room.

He was the embodiment of physical perfection; certainly the most beautifully formed male she had ever seen before. The smooth brown body bespoke of suppleness and the nimble agility of a cat, despite banded layers of iron muscles rippling beneath an unclouded skin.

The face, with its frank, grave eyes, impressed her as being both handsome and highly intelligent. There was an air of majestic nobility in his posture and the poise of his well-shaped head that would have aroused envy in the heart of any Sepharian.

A muffled knocking at the door startled her; but before she could respond, the Cro-Magnon slipped past her to lower the bar into place.

Again came the soft, insistent knock. Tharn stepped close beside the princess, pointed at the door and then to her lips, at the same time pressing the point of his knife gently against her side. The meaning was clear; she must send away, unwarned, whoever was outside.

"Who is there?" she called.

"Forgive me for disturbing you, princess," came a muffled reply, "but the man you warned us of is somewhere near here. Have you seen or heard anything more of him?"

Alurna paused for a second, weighing her chances. But the cave-man's cold gaze conquered the temptation.

"No," she said, "I have seen nothing more of him. Go now, that I may sleep."

THARN heard the man outside move away. Satisfied that he had gained a brief respite from discovery, he returned to the window.

He pinched out the flaming wick in the dish of fat standing on a wooden bracket nearby, to prevent someone in the grounds below seeing him at the window. In the moonlight he could see several groups of warriors about the grounds—patrols, posted to prevent him from leaving the building. But Tharn had no intention of leaving until Dylara was free to go with him.

From the floor above, and not far to his left, there jutted out a tiny balcony, its slender stone columns topped with a balustrade of the same material. As Tharn's eyes lingered there, an idea popped suddenly into his mind.

After placing the bowl of grease on the floor, he tore the bracket from the wall and wrenched one of its supporting wooden rods away. This done, he tied one end of his grass rope to the exact center of the thick cylinder and returned to the window.

Holding the free end of the rope in one hand, he poised the length of wood, spear-fashion, aimed carefully, then launched it toward the stone supports of the balustrade above and to his left.

Like an arrow it sped up and out, to pass c l e a n l y between two of the columns. Hauling in the slack, Tharn felt the rod catch lengthwise above him; and though he tugged with all the strength of his arms, the rope remained secure.

Without a backward glance, the cave-man swung into space, at the same time clambering hand over hand up the swinging strands. As his feet left the ledge, he heard the door of the girl's

Thora swung the nearest warrior bodily into the air

room fly open and her voice ring out.

The echo of that call had not faded as young Tharn closed a hand on the balcony's rail, pulled himself over and leaped through the window beyond.

The chamber he had entered was dimly lighted by the moon's rays. Its dense shadows might conceal a score of armed foes; but Tharn had no time to exercise caution. Three giant strides served to close the gap between window and doorway. To find the latch required only an instant; and slowly, lest the door squeak a protest, he swung it back sufficiently to look out into the corridor. Finding it empty of life, he stepped out, gently closing the door behind him.

To his right, a short distance down the hall, were two great doors, both closed; to his left, a long stretch of gallery with doors on either side. The sight of these latter held Tharn's attention, for all were barred *from the outside*. Behind one of those barred entrances, he reasoned, might be Dylara.

Stepping quietly to the first he pressed an ear to the crack. Hearing nothing, he lifted the bar with infinite care and looked in.

The room beyond was deserted. He shut the door, replaced the plank and went on to the next. It, too, was empty.

Working his way gradually forward, he had covered perhaps half the hallway and was in the act of lifting another bar from its catches, when the double doors at the far end of the gallery were thrown open and a swarm of soldiers came racing through. Before Tharn could attempt to find cover, he had been seen, and with shouts of satisfaction the men ran toward him.

REALIZING he was greatly outnumbered, the man of the caves turned to flee; but to his consternation another group of Sepharians appeared at the corridor's opposite end and, warned by the shouts of their fellows, had caught sight of the giant intruder.

Tharn knew he was trapped! To enter one of the cubicles he had been searching would mean hopeless imprisonment. Once he was within, the enemy had only to slip the bar into place.

It appeared his lone chance for freedom was to cut a way through a living wall of armed men. Once past them, Tharn felt confident they could not overtake him.

Like two angry waves, the Sepharians hurled themselves on the lone Cro-Magnon. But the steel muscles and incredible agility that had brought their owner through encounters with savage dwellers of jungle and plain were not to be so easily subdued as Sephar's warriors had supposed.

Tharn sprang to meet them, charging full into their midst. Catching the nearest foeman about the waist, the cave-man swung him bodily from the floor and hurled him, a screaming projectile of fear, into the faces of his companions.

Four went down beneath the terrific impact; but before Tharn could follow up this momentary advantage, a swiftly descending club caught him a glancing blow behind one ear.

With a roar of fury the cave-youth wheeled and plunged his knife into the breast of the club-wielder; then seizing that weapon from the fingers of the dying man, swung it in a savage arc, splitting the skulls of three foes and transforming the weighty bludgeon into a handful of splinters.

Upon witnessing this superhuman feat, the balance of the Sepharians drew back in awe. Tharn, ringed about by a full score of enemies, their faces drawn and tense, stopped suddenly,

caught up a stray club and once more charged.

For a moment it appeared the thin line of men would give way before that impetuous attack. The one directly in Tharn's path sought to dodge aside; but mighty fingers caught him about the neck, squeezed with irresistible force, and the man dropped, his vertebrae splintered.

Suddenly Tharn's legs were buckled by the combined thrust of three pairs of arms. As he fell backward, a club dealt his head a frightful blow; a great burst of fire seemed to sear his eyes—then blackness came as consciousness left him.

* * *

THE sounds of struggling bodies, punctuated with screams of rage and anguish, awakened Dylara with a start. For a second she was uncertain from whence the bedlam came; then she leaped from the bed and ran to the closed door.

From the noise that reached her, she judged some wild beast had been trapped in the corridor outside; surely no human throat could have formed the fearsome snarls and growls coming to her ears.

Soon she caught the sound of a blow, heavier than the others, followed by deep silence, broken only by labored breathing of many men.

What could it have meant? Had a slave—perhaps one of her own race—attempted an escape? Or had some great animal invaded this lair of man while searching for food?

The thought never came to her that it might have been Tharn surprised outside her door. So positive was she that the cave-man had died beneath arrow and club, that she did not dream she had been on the verge of rescue.

It was from her door that Tharn had been lifting the bar when attacked.

CHAPTER VI

Katon

A PAINFUL sensation in one shoulder brought full consciousness to Tharn, and opening his eyes he stared blankly up into the face of a Sepharian warrior. Noticing Tharn was awake, the man lowered the spear point with which he had been prodding the captive.

"So—you are alive, after all!" exclaimed the Sepharian. "You have a hard head, my savage friend; I thought they had beaten it in for you, last night."

The speaker's thin sharp face reminded the cave-man of Toa, the hawk. Tharn's lips curled with open contempt.

"The arms of your men are weak," he said mockingly. "It took many of them to overcome me."

An angry red came into the man's cheeks. "They meant to take you alive," he snapped. "Try to escape and you will find a quick death." He turned on his heel and strode away.

Tharn sat up and glanced about. It was evident he was in some subterranean spot; the air was cool and slightly damp, and there was that musty odor found only beneath the earth's surface. High up in one wall he made out an immense grating of some sort outlined against an early morning sky.

As the light grew stronger he saw the room to be tremendous. He noticed now that he was not alone; near the far wall lay a full score of sleeping men—many of them apparently cave-men like himself.

The sound of feet to his left attracted Tharn. He saw several men enter the cell through the room's single door, and place huge platters of meat on the several long tables near one wall. Noticing the sleeping men were rousing

and taking stools about those tables, Tharn got to his feet and, ignoring their curious stares, joined them there.

Lowering his weight onto one of the three-legged stools, Tharn dipped into one of the great platters a neighbor had pushed toward him. As he ate, he looked about at the faces of his fellow prisoners.

They were an ill-assorted lot, most of them Sepharians, the balance men of his own kind. The former, without exception, seemed to carry themselves with the swaggering truculence of the true adventurer; the latter seemed sullen and aloof, like caged animals.

Among them all, however, was one who stood out in vivid contrast. Seated almost directly across from Tharn was a tall muscular Sepharian with a strong face and a pair of the bluest eyes Tharn had ever seen. His well-proportioned body, tanned almost to blackness, had much of the regal bearing that graced the cave-man's own.

Catching Tharn's eye, the stranger smiled suddenly, and unconsciously Tharn smiled in return. Thus encouraged, the Sepharian leaned forward and said:

"How did they happen to catch you?"

THOSE were the first actually friendly words Tharn had heard since the night he had left his own caves. For a moment he hesitated to answer, uncertain of the motive behind the other's interest.

"I was hunting for someone," he said finally.

The blue eyes widened a bit. "You mean they found you *in* Sephar?"

"If, by Sephar, you mean the strange caves inside the high cliff—yes."

The Sepharian shook his head in honest tribute. "But why did you come here? You must have known they would get you sooner or later."

"They have my mate here," Tharn explained briefly. "I came to get her."

"And now they have you both!"

Tharn's eyes narrowed and his jaw tightened. "They will not keep us," he said simply.

The other smiled a little. "I am Katon," he said, after a slight pause. "Who are you?"

Tharn told him, and the conversation lapsed for a while.

Meanwhile, a guard had entered the great room and approached Vulcar, the one who had reminded Tharn of Toa, the hawk. The two men spoke together for a few moments, then the captain of the guards came up behind Tharn and dropped a hand roughly on the cave-man's shoulder.

Tharn, in the midst of strangers, the memory of last night's battle still fresh in his mind, acted instinctively.

Bounding from his stool, he whirled on the startled Vulcar. Before the stupefied captain could lift a hand in defense, he found himself flat on his back, two knees pinning his shoulders to the floor, while iron fingers were shutting off his breath.

The entire body of prisoners and attendants was thrown into confusion. One of the guards leaped to the side of the cave-man and would have driven a spear into his back had not Katon vaulted the table and shoved him sprawling.

As though by signal, the prisoners threw themselves upon the handful of guards, and the room became a seething inferno of flailing arms and threshing legs, the four walls echoing muffled shouts, screams, curses.

Unmindful of the tumult about him, Katon knelt beside Tharn and the now weakly struggling Vulcar. Grasping the Cro-Magnon's steel-thewed wrists, he tugged with all his more than or-

dinary strength to loosen the awful grip.

"Stop it, Tharn!" he panted. "Let go! If he dies they will kill you!"

Slowly the red mist of anger faded as Katon's words reached the savage brain; and slowly, almost regretfully, Tharn obeyed.

As he rose from the floor and stepped back, a large group of guards broke into the room and joined the fight between attendants and prisoners. With lusty swings of spear shafts the newcomers beat the battling captives into a semblance of order against one wall.

AS FOR Vulcar—he lay where Tharn had left him, tortured lungs sucking air in great gulps as the livid hue of his face gradually faded. Vulcar had been very near to death.

Finally he got shakily to his feet, assisted by two of his men. For a full minute he could not speak as he swayed there, rubbing at the angry red welts where Tharn's merciless fingers had closed.

"Seize that madman!" he croaked at last; "seize and tie him! A few touches of the whip will teach him how to act!"

Before the hesitant warriors could act, Katon had stepped into the breach.

"Wait, Vulcar," he pleaded. "Do not have him whipped. The man is a barbarian; he believed you had attacked him, and acted so. Had he stopped to think, he would not have dared raise a hand against the mightiest fighter in all Sephar."

Vulcar was shrewd enough to see that Katon had made it possible for him to save face before the others without chancing another battle. He realized the cave-man would resist an attempt to punish him, and such resistance might inflame the prisoners anew.

"Perhaps you are right, Katon," he admitted reluctantly. "But I shall not be so lenient if it happens again."

Tharn, listening, shrugged indifferently. The incident was closed as far as he was concerned, and Vulcar's thinly veiled threat did not impress him.

"I was about to tell your wild friend," the captain continued, "that Urim has sent word he is to be brought before him at once. Perhaps you had better come along, Katon; you seem to be the only one able to control him."

The three men crossed the huge cell, passed through the guarded doorway and went up a long ramp to the first floor of the palace. There they turned left and moved along a narrow corridor until stopped by a heavy door. Vulcar rapped on this with his knife hilt, it opened from the opposite side and they stepped through.

What met the cave-man's eyes caused him to catch his breath, so unusual did it appear to one who had known nothing more elaborate than simple caves and tangled fastness of jungle and forest.

Here was a great, high-ceilinged room, well-filled with warriors, citizens, slaves—even a sprinkling of women—all grouped about a low wooden frustum, it four sides consisting of steps. On the flattened apex stood a large chair, complete with arm-rests and towering back. Here sat the dignified figure of Urim, ruler of Sephar.

AS THARN and his companions entered, all conversation ceased, every eye turned toward them, and there was a great craning of necks. Some of those present had heard details of the cave-man's capture—details that had lost nothing in the telling. His god-like figure, the rippling sinews beneath a sun-bronzed skin, the primitive loin-cloth of panther hide—all drew forth murmurs of admiration.

As for Tharn—he strode toward the elevated throne with all of Sadu's majestic fearlessness. His level gray eyes bored into those of the man above him, and despite himself, Urim stiffened under their challenge.

When they had halted, Urim spoke, addressing his words to Vulcar.

"Is this the prowler you captured in the slave quarters?" he asked, indicating Tharn.

"It is, O Urim."

The ruler's eyes shifted to the stiffly erect figure of Katon. "Why have you brought this man?" he demanded.

"The prisoner has been troublesome," explained Vulcar. "Since Katon seems able to manage him, I brought him along."

Urim's face lost some of its good nature. "Well, Katon," he said coldly, "I have not forgotten you. Do you find the pits more to your taste than being in charge of the quarry slaves?"

Katon's face was without expression. "Both places have their good points, O Urim," he replied evenly.

Urim scowled. "Let me remind you the Games are not far away. I doubt that you will find many good points there—unless they be fang points!"

He turned back to Tharn. "What were you seeking in Sephar, forest-man?"

"I came here for my mate," Tharn said briefly.

"Your mate?"

"Yes. She was taken by your men three suns ago not far from here."

Urim looked questioningly at Vulcar. "He must mean the girl you brought in a few days ago. I understood the man with her had been slain."

"This is the one," admitted Vulcar. "There is an arrow wound—a fresh one—in his side. When we took the girl, the man with her was struck by an arrow. But we thought he had died from a blow from one of our clubs; it seems impossible that he has survived its force."

For several minutes the ruler of Sephar sat lost in thought, his eyes on the giant Cro-Magnon. This wild man's fate was in his hands, and his alone. As a slave the man would make an excellent guard or warrior—that is, were he tractable, amenable to discipline. Yet something warned him this man would recognize no authority or law beyond his own. Such a slave would only stir up unrest, perhaps open rebellion among his fellows.

And so Urim made his decision.

"Confine him to the pits, Vulcar," he commanded in dismissal. "He is to take part in the Games."

Vulcar led them out. A few moments later the two prisoners were standing within the mammoth dungeon, watching silently as the great door swung shut, hearing the heavy bars fall into place.

HARDLY had Tharn left the throne-room when Dylara and Nada entered, accompanied by two guards.

An amazing transformation had been made in the appearance of Majok's daughter. The stained animal skin, that once had afforded an inadequate covering, was gone—replaced by a sleeveless tunic that fell from throat to knees. Her luxuriant curls of deep brown were neatly drawn behind her ears; on her feet were strong sandals of leather.

She hesitated slightly at sight of many strange faces, the serried ranks of motionless warriors about Urim's elevated throne, and, finally, the lordly figure of Urim, himself.

Regaining confidence, she walked slowly through the press of Sepharians as they cleared a pathway to the foot of Urim's chair.

Both women and their escorts halted a few paces short of the steps. Three heads were humbly lowered; Dylara alone gazed artlessly up at the monarch.

Urim hid his smile with a casual hand. Were all cave-people so difficult to impress? This savage girl was a beauty, though; the other women of the room certainly suffered by comparison. By the God! If there were not a hundred suitors at her heels before long he would have missed his guess. Even old Uglor, that confirmed misogynist, was staring at her, his heart in his eyes!

"Is this girl in your care, Nada?" he asked.

"She is, O Urim."

"She understands nothing of our customs?"

"That is true."

"She will be of no use, then," observed Urim, "until she has learned them. I think it would be best to keep her apart from the other slaves until then.

"You, Nada, shall teach her our ways; you are excused from other duties. See that she is taught to give service as a hand-maiden—she is far too beautiful for harder tasks. When she has learned all that you can teach her, let me know and I shall see to it that she has a kind mistress."

Nada could not hide her gratitude. It was clear that Urim had taken an interest in the new slave-girl, and it gladdened the older woman's heart to know Dylara's lot was to be an easy one.

Their interview ended, the two women were about to leave when the door opened to admit Jotan, Tamar and Javan.

Jotan, slightly in the lead, halted directly in front of Dylara. Indifferent to all else, he gazed deeply into the startled eyes of the cave-girl.

Dylara felt her cheeks grow warm under the unmistakable message in the man's eyes. She was conscious, in a peculiar detached way, of a strange, disturbing fascination. Somehow she knew this declaration was coming from deep within the heart of the square-faced young warrior; that the love he professed so silently was honest and complete.

Tamar nudged Javan sharply with an indignant elbow. "Look at him!" he growled under his breath. "There stands our friend—staring at a barbarian wench as though she were a nobleman's daughter! We've got to do something about this, Javan."

There was a dreamy expression in Javan's eyes. "She *is* beautiful, at that," he whispered. "Maybe we—"

HIS voice trailed off as one of the escorting guards, impatient at the delay, took Dylara by one arm and urged her on.

The movement brought realization of their surroundings to both the man and the woman. Jotan stepped aside to let them pass, his face expressionless.

Dylara and Nada walked slowly along the corridor between the two guards. The girl seemed subdued, deep in thought. Nada, watching her covertly, said:

"He loves you, Dylara."

The cave-girl nodded. "I know. . . . Who is he, Nada? I'm certain he's never seen me before. Do men fall in love so quickly?"

Her companion smiled. "They have been known to," she observed drily. "He is Jotan, the son of a nobleman of Ammad. He has been in Sephar only a day or two."

"I like him," Dylara said. "You must tell me more about him."

Nada glanced sharply at the girl. "I

know only what is told by palace slaves and guards. Such tales are not always true."

The guards stopped before the door of the room where Dylara had spent the night before. Nada said, "This is where we are to stay until Urim is ready to give you to some woman of the court."

As the door closed behind them, she added: "They will bring us food, shortly. While we eat, I shall tell you all I can about Sephar and Ammad . . . and Jotan."

CHAPTER VII

Woman Against Woman

AS the door closed behind Tharn and Katon, the former noticed that, but for themselves, the great cell was empty of life.

"Where are the others?" he asked, as they sat down on a pile of skins near one wall.

"In the arena, I suppose," Katon replied. "We must have exercise in the open air almost daily if we are to be in condition to put up a good fight during the Games."

"Just what are these 'Games,' Katon? From what I could make out, both of us are to take part in them."

"Shortly before each rainy season," Katon said, "sacrificial Games are held in honor of the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud. These Games consist of battles between men, and between men and beasts. At times animals alone fight, and hundreds die.

"Each succeeding day the victors of the day before are pitted against one another, until, on the last day, only one is left alive. That one, whether man or beast, is acclaimed as favorite of the God and is set free. Always, however, that one is an animal; never in Game history has a man survived. And that, my friend, is what we face."

Tharn shrugged, unimpressed. "Perhaps not. We may escape before then."

Katon shook his head. "No, Tharn. Always we are either locked in here or remain under the watchful eyes of many warriors during exercise periods in the arena.

"No, there is no escape—unless you can overcome every life-loving fighting man and half-starved beast of the Games."

He looked up in time to catch the slight smile on Tharn's lips. No shadow of fear, no hint of concern clouded the cave-man's calm gray eyes. Limitless self-confidence, backed by superhuman strength and nerves of granite, had rendered impotent the ominous note in Katon's words.

The Sepharian felt a bit exasperated. What was the use of warning this headstrong wild-man of danger if danger meant nothing to him?

"Don't you understand?" he exclaimed. "The chance of either of us surviving the Games is so small that we may as well forget it."

Tharn's smile widened. "We are not dead yet. Much can happen before the Games begin. The rainy season is almost a moon away."

Katon gave it up. One could not make the blind see, nor the deaf hear. This barbarian would lose his smile when they put him in the arena with a hungry lion!

THARN, seeking to change the subject, said, "I saw that this man, Urim, hates you, Katon. Is it because of him that you are here?"

There was a wry twist to Katon's lips. "Urim and I were once great friends. I came to Sephar from Huxla, a city of Ammad, where my father is ruler. Upon arriving here, I entered

Urim's service as a common warrior. During a hunting trip, I saved him from being mauled by a wounded lion. In gratitude he put me in charge of Sephar's quarries — a position much sought after by Sepharian nobles.

"And then I met a girl—the daughter of a nobleman. She was very beautiful; and before long we were in love."

Katon seemed to have forgotten Tharn's presence. His speech was slow, his words toneless and deliberate. The cave-man was quick to sense the other's mental suffering as he recounted a painful chapter of his life.

"As it turned out," Katon continued, "Urim, himself, desired this girl and was planning to make her Sephar's queen. When he learned that she loved me, his anger was very great, and one night I was taken from my bed and put here."

His voice took on a deeper note. "The next morning they called to take the girl to Urim. They found her on the floor of her room, dead, a knife driven into her heart. She had taken her own life."

The two men talked on, while the time slipped by. Finally their conversation turned to religion as accepted by the Sepharians. Tharn found his friend's explanation difficult to understand; a creed that allowed a single god both to threaten and defend his worshippers was far beyond his simple direct way of thinking.

One part of Katon's remarks on religion did interest him, however. This concerned the friction between Urim and Pryak, high priest in Sephar of the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud. Of this, Katon offered the following:

"Pryak is as cruel and tyrannical as Urim is kind and just. Many rites and ceremonies introduced by the high priest have so angered the king that he has banned their practice—a move widening the rift between the two men.

"Twice, I am told, they have quarreled openly; but Urim's warriors and followers so outnumber those of Pryak, that the priest dares not persist. By doing so he might plunge the entire city into civil war; for much of Sephar would flock to Pryak's side, since he is the true representative of our god.

"Each passing day, however, brings the tension nearer a breaking point. Pryak is crafty and wise and very proud. Some day he will seek to overthrow Urim and put a more friendly ruler in his place. Even Pryak, himself, may take the throne. It would not be the first time in our history a high priest became king!"

THE entrance of the balance of the prisoners ended their conversation at this point. After the noon meal was eaten the men lay down on their beds to rest.

Tharn found sleep hard to find. Flat on his back he lay, eyes fixed unseeingly on the grill-work far above him, while his mind reviewed the remarkable adventures that had befallen him since he had set out on a mission of vengeance.

How long ago it seemed, now, since he had taken up the trail of those who had attacked his people! And now he was a prisoner of a race whose very existence had been undreamed of a few suns ago. A captive, too, was the girl who had been so abruptly thrust into his life, bringing with her the beauty and pangs of love.

Dylara! Where was she now? Did she believe him dead, a victim of arrow and club? Had she given up all hope of ever seeing again her father and the caves of Majok, to accept tamely the life of a slave?

In spite of having known her only

for a short time, he doubted this. There was too much of the haughty pride of a born princess in her to submit tamely to such a fate. Given the chance she would brave the perils of jungle and plain in an effort to locate her own tribe.

As he lay there, motionless, watching sunlight streaming through the opening overhead, the resolve grew strong within him to win Dylara's freedom, and his, from this strange place and its stranger inhabitants. They had him now—but it would take more than a few doors and walls to keep him.

* * *

WHEN the door had closed behind Dylara and Nada, Jotan turned to his two companions. He found them staring at him reproachfully.

"And now," Tamer said bitingly, "now that half of Sephar knows you are in love with a slave-girl, perhaps we can pay our respects to Urim, whom we have kept waiting."

Jotan was suddenly conscious of the curious eyes of men and women. Beyond the crowd of Sepharians was Urim on his elevated chair, peering over the heads between him and the three men near the door.

Jotan chuckled a little. "For her I would keep many kings waiting," he said in a low voice. "But you are right, of course. Come."

The three men moved through the crowd. Jotan's arrogant bearing and handsome face drew forth almost as many whispered comments as had the appearance of Tharn earlier that morning.

At sight of the three visitors, Urim's florid countenance lighted up with pleasure; and half-rising, he called to them.

"You are welcome, noble guests from Ammad!" he cried. "I had hoped you would come here, this morning. Come closer; there are many here who have asked to meet you."

When they had reached the frustum's base, Urim descended and, in turn, presented various members of his retinue. Introductions were acknowledged, and there was much small talk.

Jotan's interest in the somewhat lengthy ceremony was purely mechanical. His thoughts were with the cave-princess he had met at the door; in fact, he had thought of little else since he had first seen her on the day before. His determination to ask Urim for her had been strengthened by the chance meeting, and he resolved to wait no longer; as soon as these introductions were finished, he would make known to Urim his wishes.

As he stood there, head and shoulders above the throng about him, a pair of flashing gray-green eyes watched him intently, eyes that had burned angrily as they observed the meeting between him and the cave-girl. They were the eyes of the princess Alurna, who, with her hand-maiden, Anela, had come into the room by another entrance at the very moment Jotan had barred Dylara's path. Unobserved, she had witnessed the entire incident, and her hatred for the lovely captive was intensified a hundred-fold thereby.

Alurna had slept but little during the night before. After Tharn had vanished through her window, she had gone back to bed—but not to sleep. She could not banish thoughts of Jotan; she could not close out the memory of those flint-like blue eyes that could soften so wonderfully when their owner smiled.

And so, near morning, she had finally admitted to herself that she loved this broad-shouldered visitor from a distant land. Her admission brought with it no peace of mind; for, she told herself furiously, it would have

been bad enough to love anyone; but to feel so toward a man who had eyes only for another—and a savage, at that!—was more than she could bear. Utterly miserable, she bit her lips to force back her tears and glowered resentfully at the unsuspecting Jotan.

INTRODUCTIONS completed, Urim returned to his chair and his duties. The others broke up into little groups; some attending closely the details of various petitions and demands of Sephar's citizens; others conversing among themselves and paying no heed to what went on about them.

Tamar, Javan and Jotan formed one of these latter groups, having withdrawn to some distance from the throne itself, at Jotan's whispered request.

Alurna saw the three men move apart from the rest.

"Quick, Anela," she murmured, grasping the girl's arm, "get close enough to those three to hear what they say. Don't let them suspect you are listening. Go!"

Anela nodded, and slipped away through the crowd. . . .

"What now?" asked Tamar, eyeing Jotan's set face narrowly.

Jotan was watching the gradually thinning knot of Sepharians at the foot of the throne. He said:

"When Urim has finished there, I shall make my request of him. Until then we may as well wait here."

Tamar scowled; then suddenly he smiled. "Listen, Jotan," he said rapidly "let it go for a few days. After all, you want to be sure of a thing like this. Then, if you still want her—why—take her. It won't be necessary to go about telling everyone she is to be your mate. Javan and I can arrange to get her for you without it being known you are interested. Then, after you've had her for a while, if you still feel the same way, let it be known she is your mate. I've an idea, though, that it will never get that far. You'll learn that—"

Tamar saw the gleam in Jotan's eye, gulped, and was silent.

For a long moment Jotan stared at his friend, his expression one of mixed pity and scorn. Then, with cool deliberateness, he turned and started toward the throne.

"Wait, Jotan!" Tamar stepped in front of him. "I was wrong. I shouldn't have said that. I see how it is, now, and I'll help you all I can. But at least do this: Wait until you can speak to Urim alone. Tonight, after the evening meal, draw Urim to one side and make your request—not while all Sephar is watching you."

Tamar's distress was so genuine that Jotan stopped. After all, it meant the difference of only a few hours; if such a concession would appease his friend it would be a small price to pay.

"Very well, Tamar," he agreed. "I will wait until then."

None of the three noticed a figure detach itself from the fringe of the crowd nearest them and hurry away.

WHEN the eavesdropping slave girl reached Alurna's side, the princess drew her into a deserted corridor outside the room.

"What were they saying, Anela?" she asked impatiently.

"The handsome one spoke of asking your father for someone—a woman. One of the others sought to change his mind, but he would not listen."

Such a soul-searing flame of hate went through Alurna that her heart seemed to wither in its heat. At sight of her mistress' expression Anela shrank away in terror.

"Did he say when he intends asking for this woman?"

Anela swallowed. "Tonight," she

faltered, "—after the evening meal."

For a moment Alurna stood there in thought. Then, dismissing the girl with a gesture, she turned and strode rapidly along the corridor, away from the audience hall.

Her head pounded with jumbl d thoughts. Over and over she told herself that Jotan should never have the golden-skinned cave-girl. There were ways to prevent it; no slave could have the man Alurna wanted!

The princess went directly to her own apartment. Closing and bolting her door, she sank wearily onto the wide bed. With an arm across her eyes, she lay down, thinking bitter thoughts and shaping many plans to prevent Jotan from having the girl he desired. Each plan, however, was discarded in turn as being either too difficult to accomplish or too liable to failure.

How? How? How? Ask her father to refuse Jotan's request? No; that would bring to light facts she preferred kept hidden. Have her killed? Too dangerous. If Urim ever discovered who was responsible she would pay a terrible price.

And then out of nowhere came her answer. Alurna rolled over and sat up as the idea took shape in her mind.

"Anela!" she called.

Immediately someone tried the door, and finding it locked, rapped timidly.

Alurna rose and admitted the still apprehensive girl.

"Listen to me closely, Anela," commanded the princess, closing the door. "Do you know Meltor?"

Anela was surprised. "Why—yes. He is one of the guards stationed at the palace entrance."

"Tell him," the princess said crisply, "to come here at once."

The slave-girl started to say something, reconsidered, and went out. A few minutes later she was back, followed by a tall slender young man, whose dark expressionless face bore a long livid scar across one cheek.

"Leave us, Anela," Alurna said softly . . . "Sit down, Meltor."

THE man lowered himself stiffly on the edge of a stool and looked at Urim's daughter with steady eyes. His face might as well have been masked, so completely was it lacking in expression.

"Meltor," said the princess, "I have kept a secret of yours for many moons —a secret that, were I to divulge it to a certain nobleman, would cost you your life. Am I right?"

A shadow of uneasiness crossed the warrior's face.

"Did the daughter of Urim," he said dryly, "summon me here that I might be reminded of something best forgotten?"

Alurna smiled. It was not a nice smile. "The nobleman, too, would like to forget. But he cannot—until his daughter is avenged."

Meltor said nothing.

"It is not a secret to remember," Alurna said smoothly. "I want very much to forget it. And if you will help me, Meltor, I promise never again to remind you of it."

"What is it you want me to do?"

The princess bent forward. "Deep within the jungle beyond the Gate of the Setting Sun, is an old abandoned house of stone. It was there Rydob, the hermit, lived for uncounted years. Do you know the place?"

The young warrior nodded. "Yes, I know where it is. Nobody goes there since Rydob's bones were found on his own doorstep."

"Yes," Alurna said contemptuously. "They fear Rydob more after his death than when he lived. I hope you are different, Meltor."

The man flushed. "I am not afraid, daughter of Urim."

"Good! I knew I could count on you. Now listen to me carefully; there must be no mistakes."

For half an hour the princess spoke steadily. The guard listened attentively, interrupting now and then to ask questions; twice he offered suggestions.

When Alurna had finished, Meltor remained silent for a few minutes, mentally reviewing the plan's details. The girl watched him with narrowed eyes.

"I shall need help," he said at last. "I have no right to enter the slave quarters."

Alurna nodded. "I shall leave that up to you. You are known to the guards there; find one you can trust and enlist his aid. Promise him much, but tell him no more than is necessary."

Meltor got to his feet. His face had resumed its habitual lack of expression.

"Your orders shall be carried out, daughter of Urim," he said flatly. "I will report to you, here, when I have finished."

The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

Abduction

THE humid heat of early afternoon hung in shimmering waves over Sephar's walls and buildings of stone. Except for an occasional perspiring warrior or slave, hurrying on some urgent mission, the broad avenues were quite deserted.

In a palace wing containing the female slave quarters, Dylara and Nada were together. The daughter of Majok lay stretched at full length on her bed, hands locked beneath her head, drowsily watching a patch of sunlight near the ceiling. Nada nodded sleepily on a low stool near the bed.

Dylara yawned audibly to break the silence. She rolled over and touched the older woman on one arm.

"I don't want to sleep, Nada," she protested. "Let's talk awhile. You promised to tell me about him—Jotan, I mean. I keep thinking about him—how he acted, staring at me the way he did."

Nada smiled, and patted the hand on her arm. She had been thinking of her only son—of him whom she had last seen as a little boy. She had wanted to overcome a strange reluctance to question Dylara about him; what he had been like, if he was big like his father . . . little things that meant much to a mother.

"I will do the best I can," she said. "What I say will be only what is repeated among the slaves and guards.

"Jotan's home is in Ammad—about which I have already told you. His father is a nobleman there—one of the most powerful and influential men in that country. Jotan is well liked by all who know him; they say his followers would die in his service and count themselves honored."

"I think I can understand that," said Dylara dreamily. "There is something about him that takes hold of you—awakens your imagination. Many girls must care a great deal for him."

Nada glanced sharply at her, and was on the point of making some comment, when there came a sudden brief rap at the closed door.

"I wonder who that can be," she said, frowning. Rising, she crossed to the door and drew it open.

A guard in a grayish-white tunic stood at the threshold. Behind him, half-concealed by the shadows of the hall, was a second man.

"Urim," said the guard gruffly, "wishes the slave-girl Dylara brought to him at once."

For some reason this unexpected summons alarmed Nada. "I do not understand. What does he want of her?"

"I forgot to ask him!" retorted the guard sarcastically. He beckoned to Dylara. "Come; I have no time to waste."

THE cave-girl approached uneasily, affected more by Nada's concern than the prospect of being brought before Urim.

The guard stepped aside to let her pass, then turned to leave.

"Wait!" Nada cried. "I am going with you."

The man scowled. "I was not told to bring you," he snapped. "You stay here." He went out, slamming the door.

Dylara, a man at either side, was led down the long corridor and through the double doorway. There they paused while the two men held a brief conversation in whispers too low for the girl to make out their words.

And then the second man approached and took hold of her arm. "You are to come with me," he said. "I am to take you to Urim."

Dylara's skin crawled under the contact. She jerked away. "I do not need to be held."

The dim light hid the man's angry face. "Slaves do as they are told," he reminded her coldly. "Do not forget that."

Grasping her arm roughly, he strode along the hall, the girl beside him. Shortly afterward they descended the great staircase to the main floor of the palace.

They met no one on the way, the intense heat having sent the palace inhabitants to their beds to rest until early evening.

To Dylara's mingled surprise and alarm, her escort moved straight to the great doorway leading to the palace grounds. Four guards lounging outside the entrance watched them pass, nodding briefly to the man with her.

They turned into one of the wide streets that led to the city's outer wall.

Dylara fought down a wave of panic. "Where are you taking me?"

The man was quick to sense her fear. He tightened his hold on her arm.

"To Urim," he replied briefly.

"Where is he?"

The Sepharian turned his head and frowned at her. For the first time Dylara noticed the long white scar across his cheek.

"You ask too many questions," he said roughly. "Now keep them to yourself."

A cold hand seemed to close about the girl's heart. She knew, now, that Urim had not sent for her; that she was being led into some horrible danger. Worst of all, there seemed no way to prevent this man from doing as he pleased. The street was deserted; and even should someone appear, an appeal for help would probably be useless.

Soon they reached one of the huge gateways in the wall about Sephar. The warrior drew Dylara to a halt as two guards sauntered in their direction.

"Well, Meltor," said one, a tall, languid man of middle age, "what are you doing out in this heat? And with a girl, too; up to your old tricks, I suppose."

Meltor smiled without humor. "This is something else. If I may speak with you privately . . ."

DYLARA, under the watchful eye of the second guard, watched them step away a few paces and engage in a whispered colloquy. Meltor did most of the talking, speaking earnestly and

at length. The other nodded from time to time, appearing properly impressed. Once or twice he glanced with interest at the girl.

Meltor had evidently gained his point. He approached Dylara, now, a triumphant curl at the corners of his mouth.

"We must hurry," was all he said. Together the man and the girl passed through the twin gates.

Beyond the open ground Dylara could see the grim forest rising dark and forbidding against the sky. And yet she wondered if it was more to be feared than the city of stone behind them. Danger lurked in the jungle—ah, yes; but it was danger both direct and elemental—not hidden beneath hypocrisy and artifice.

Why had she been taken from Sephar? She was certain this man was not acting in his own behalf; someone else was behind it all—someone who did not want others to know. It could not be Urim. Urim was chief; he need not hide his activities from anybody. Yet who else could it be?

Suddenly a great light burst upon her. Jotan! He was responsible—it could be no other! Because she belonged to Urim he had been forced to have her stolen from the palace and taken to some out-of-the-way spot that he might be with her. This was the answer—the only answer!

Belief became certainty; and with it came indecision. A strange mixture of dread and exultation came over her. Her heart beat faster at thought of meeting the man who had aroused within her an emotion as yet unfathomable. But matters were being brought to a head much too quickly to suit her—she needed more time.

Unconsciously she slowed her steps, pulling back at the grip on her arm. They were already within the jungle, hidden from Sephar by a bend of the trail underfoot.

Meltor, satisfied that the girl would accompany him peaceably, had relaxed his hold.

Suddenly Dylara twisted free, and before the surprised warrior could interfere, she whirled about and dashed away in the opposite direction.

Meltor wheeled and took up the chase, crying out hoarsely for her to stop. But the rage in his voice only spurred on the girl to greater effort.

Along the trail they raced, a few yards apart, their sandaled feet kicking up little puffs of dust and powdered vegetation. The nimble-footed girl was gradually increasing her lead, seeking to gain the bend in the trail with enough time for concealment before Meltor could catch sight of her again.

And then, without warning, something caught at her ankle, plunging her headlong to the ground with terrific force. Half-stunned, she made a weak effort to regain her feet, when a strong hand grasped her roughly by an arm and jerked her upright.

THE rage-distorted face of Meltor swam hazily before her. She blinked rapidly in an effort to dispel the fog.

"You little fool!" The words seemed to come to her from across a great distance. "Try that again, and I'll—"

There sounded a sharp ringing "crack," and Dylara staggered back, her left cheek flaming from the force of an open-handed blow.

The slap transformed the girl from a dazed, bewildered child into an infuriated tigress; and for the next few moments Meltor had all he could do to keep from being badly mauled.

Exhausted, she finally sank to her knees and burst into a storm of tears. Meltor stood by, more or less winded himself, fingering a long scratch along-

side his nose, waiting for the girl to regain composure.

At last he pulled her to her feet, and urged her along the path into the west. Dylara, her once spotless tunic grimy and torn, accompanied him docilely now, too weary to resist. She knew by this time that Jotan had nothing to do with her abduction; no hireling of his would dare handle her so roughly.

An hour later they entered a small clearing, deep in the heart of the jungle. In the center of the open ground stood a rambling, one-storied building of gray stone, weather-beaten and unkempt, its unprotected windows staring vacantly like the dull lifeless eyes of a corpse. Despite the flame-tipped rays of the mid-afternoon sun which flooded the clearing, Dylara shivered, conscious of the miasmatic atmosphere of the place.

Nor was Meltor entirely unaffected by the eerie aspect of dead Rydob's former residence. Details of stories he had heard about the old hermit came to him now, and he caught himself glancing nervously about.

A short series of stone steps led to the half open door. A profusion of vines and creepers had sprung up unchecked, partially covering the stairway. Meltor cautiously kicked the vegetation away, aware it might be the hiding place of little Sleeza, the snake —Sleeza, whose bite meant a lingering, painful death.

Suddenly the man jumped back, voicing a yell of terror, and almost upsetting Dylara. His prodding foot had torn away a curtain of foliage, disclosing the bleached skeleton of a man, stretched out on one of the steps. The skull had rolled a few paces away, and lay there grinning malevolently up at them.

Dylara shuddered, shrank back. She had seen the bones of man before; but under present conditions and surroundings the gleaming skeleton seemed a horrible prophecy of her own fate.

"Who could it have been?" she asked in an awed whisper.

Meltor forced a grin. He had managed to regain control of his shattered nerves.

"Old Rydob, the hermit," he replied. "And no prettier in death than he was in life. Some say he was the brother of Pryak, the high priest."

Taking Dylara by the elbow, he urged her past the pile of bones and over the threshold.

THEY came into a huge, high-ceilinged room, well-lighted by the sun. From its appearance the girl judged that Rydob had spent most of his time here; the ruins of a bed stood in one corner, while a large table in the center of the room held a jumbled collection of stone dishes and bowls. Several tunics, rotten with mildew, hung across one of the three chairs about the table.

And over everything was a thick layer of dust and cobwebs and the droppings of countless rodents.

Meltor kicked over two of the stools to clear them of dust, replaced them, then cleared the table top in the same way.

"Sit there," he said, pointing to one of the stools.

Dylara obeyed without a word, watching the man seat himself across the table from her.

There followed a period of silence. Thus far, Meltor had carried out his plan to the letter. But now, faced with the unpleasant part of his task, he was beginning to feel decidedly qualmish.

How truly beautiful she was! Not the empty loveliness of perfect features alone; there was personality and fire and a keen, alert mind mirrored in those grave brown eyes and the sweet

curve of sensitive lips.

And then he thought of Alurna and the secret she held, and the memory put an abrupt end to growing misgivings.

Dylara, who was trying to fathom what lay behind the man's cold expressionless face, broke the silence.

"Why have you brought me here?"

Meltor hesitated. Why not tell her? Perhaps the knowledge would drive her into making a second attempt to escape. And then . . .

"I suppose there is no reason why you should not be told," he said slowly. "It will make no difference—now.

"You have made an enemy in Sephar. How it happened, I do not know—nor does it matter. It is enough that you are in the way—and must die."

The calm emotionless statement brought no sense of shock to Dylara. She had known what was coming—known it as surely as though he had said the words an hour ago. In a curiously detached way she was conscious of the brilliant sunlight streaming through the windows; of the strident voices of many birds in the nearby jungle; of the slow-moving wind among many leaves . . .

"I do not want to kill you," Meltor continued. "You are too young to die. I would like to let you go—to leave you in the forest to go back to the caves you call home."

As he spoke, his hand dropped below the table's edge, fumbled there, then reappeared, a long knife of stone in his fingers.

"But I dare not do that," he went on, in the same flat monotone. "You might turn up again in Sephar and ruin everything. I cannot risk it."

Was he, Dylara wondered, trying to goad her into some act of resistance, that he might escape the stigma of cold-blooded murder? Fascinated, unable to look away, she watched him lift the keen-edged blade.

Suddenly he rose and lunged across the table toward her. Dylara knew the moment had come.

CHAPTER IX

Torture

JOTAN pushed back his plate and sighed wearily.

"I can't eat in this heat," he complained. "Besides, I have no appetite."

"It *is* hot," Javan agreed through a full mouth; "but then it's always hot at this time of day."

Tamar helped himself to another serving from the pot on the table. "It's not the heat alone that's taken his appetite, Javan," he observed disagreeably. "Our friend is so eager for evening to come that he can think of nothing else. It is then, you know, that he will become the laughing-stock of all Sephar by asking Urim for a cave-girl to take as his mate."

An hour before, the three visitors from Ammad had left the palace audience hall and returned to their quarters. After bathing and getting into fresh tunics, they had sat down to food brought from the palace kitchens.

Rising, Jotan crossed the room, sank down on a pile of sleeping furs and pulled off his sandals. Then he lay down, covered his eyes with one arm and was soon asleep.

Presently Tamar and Javan finished eating. The latter at once sought his own couch; but Tamar remained at the table, deep in thought.

Two hours went by, and still Tamar remained there, head bowed in his hands. The slaves had long since cleared the table and departed, leaving the three men to themselves.

Abruptly the seated man raised his head, his expression that of one to

whom a momentous idea has come. For a long moment he remained thus, then got silently to his feet and tip-toed to the door, let himself out and, despite the withering heat, started briskly toward the palace.

The four guards stationed at the entrance stiffened to attention as he approached. Tamar halted a few yards away and beckoned to one of them.

"Do you know me?" Tamar asked haughtily.

"Of course!" replied the young warrior humbly. "There is none in all Sephar who does not know Tamar of Ammad."

"Good. Take me at once to the quarters of the female slaves."

The eagerness in the young man's face was replaced by doubt.

"I am not permit—" he began hesitantly.

Tamar cut him short with a gesture. "Do as I say," he snapped. "The responsibility will be mine."

The warrior bowed. "Follow me."

They entered the great hall and ascended to the third floor. Outside the twin doors leading to the slave quarters they were stopped by two guards on duty there.

Tamar's guide addressed one of them. "Rokor," he said, "this is the noble Tamar of Ammad. At his command I have brought him here."

Rokor bowed deeply. "It is an honor to meet Urim's guest. How may I serve you?"

"By taking me to see one of the slave-girls here—the cave-girl, Dylara."

Something akin to a leer crept into Rokor's expression. "Oh, yes; I know the one you mean. If you will come with me . . ."

TAMAR dismissed the first guard and followed Rokor through the twin doors and down the corridor. Halting before one of the numerous doors, Rokor unbarred and opened it, then stepped aside that Tamar might enter.

A tall slender woman of early middle-age rose from a bed in one corner. But for her tunic of a slave, the visitor would have taken her for the mate of some Sepharian noble.

At his appearance, the eager expectant air she had at first assumed, faded, replaced by one of questioning doubt.

Tamar turned to Rokor. "She is not the one," he said testily. "This is not Dylara."

The guard scratched his head, baffled. "She should be here. This is her room. Urim told Nada, here, to teach her our customs."

Nada came forward and placed a hand on Tamar's arm.

"Do you seek Dylara?" she asked tensely.

Tamar nodded. "Do you know where she is?"

The woman looked meaningly at the staring guard. "If I may speak with you alone . . ."

Tamar sent the man out, and closed the door.

"Well . . ." he prompted.

Nada looked at him searchingly. Since Dylara had been taken from the room over three hours ago her concern for the girl's safety had steadily grown. She was convinced Urim had not sent for Dylara, but realized she was powerless to act in her aid.

Why Tamar had come here puzzled her; but he might be of assistance in clearing up the mystery surrounding Dylara's absence.

"What do you want of Dylara, noble Tamar?" she asked.

Tamar showed his surprise. "You know me, then?"

Nada smiled. "There is not a slave in the palace who does not know of you and your two friends."

Tamar hesitated. Something told him he would lose nothing in being frank with this woman. And there was something amiss here; Dylara's absence and this woman's concern made that evident.

"I can think of no reason why you should not know," he said. "You see, my friend Jotan has the mad idea he is in love with this Dylara. I have tried to make him see that one in his position cannot mate with a barbarian; but he will not listen. He means to ask Urim for her tonight. I came here to talk to the girl—to make her understand she could never be happy as the mate of a man so far above her. If she promises to have nothing to do with my friend, I will promise to arrange for her freedom, to return her to her own people."

It took an effort for Nada to repress a smile. "Does anyone else," she asked, "want to keep Jotan from having her?"

"Not that I know of," Tamar said, puzzled by the question. "Why do you ask?"

"Because one of the guards took Dylara from here shortly before you came. He said Urim wanted her, but I think he lied."

TAMAR stiffened. Was this some of Jotan's work? Had his friend suspected one of his companions might seek to interfere, and to thwart them, had the girl removed to another place?

He would go back and confront Jotan with this evidence. To think the man did not trust his own friends!

But what if Jotan had had nothing to do with taking the girl? Would it be better to remain silent, so that when he did learn she was missing it would be too late to discover what had become of her?

And then, cutting through the fog of selfishness and snobbery like rays of the sun through mist, came a new trend of thought, far more worthy of the real Tamar.

Jotan was his friend! They had fought side by side against a common foe; they had hunted together, traveled vast distances together, sought adventure together, gone hungry and cold—together. Ever since boyhood they had been companions—closer than brothers. And now he, Tamar, was on the verge of disloyalty to his own best friend!

His eyes blazing, he caught the astonished Nada by an arm.

"*Who* took her?" he demanded hoarsely. "Where is he, now?"

"It—it was Fordak," Nada stammered, staring wide-eyed at the man's taut face, "—Fordak and another whose face I could not see."

Tamar let go of her arm, threw open the door and went out. He found Rokor leaning against the opposite wall, waiting.

The man from Ammad masked his emotions by resuming an air of indifference.

"Come, Rokor," he said easily, "I am ready to go. The girl I came to see has been taken to another part of the palace. I have decided not to see her, after all."

As the two men walked along the corridor, Tamar said, "By the way, Rokor, do you know a guard called Fordak?"

"Why, yes," Rokor said. "He stands watch at the entrance to the slave quarters. I, myself, relieved him shortly before you came up."

"Do you know where he can be found at this time of day?"

"Probably in his room, sleeping."

"Will you take me there? I have something for him."

In his eagerness to please the noble visitor from Ammad, Rokor quite forgot to be curious.

"Gladly," he said. "Come this way."

Tamar was led to the second floor

of the palace, and along a corridor to the wing housing the warriors of Urim. Rokor stopped before a narrow opening and pounded heavily on a closed door.

"Fordak!" he bellowed; "open up here! You have a visitor."

They heard someone moving about inside, and a second later the door swung back.

A thick-shouldered man, inclined to fatness about the middle, stood there, his coarse black hair tousled, eyes heavy with sleep.

"Who wants me?" he grunted.

"This is Tamar of Ammad," Rokor explained. 'He has something for you."

Tamar interrupted. "You may leave me here, Rokor. I can find my way out when I have finished with Fordak."

WHEN the guard had gone, Tamar turned to the man Nada had named. He found the fellow eyeing him respectfully.

"Fordak," said the man from Ammad, "I have need of a fearless warrior to do something for me. One who can do as instructed and, at the same time, keep his mouth shut. You were recommended as such. Will you help me?"

Fordak rubbed one side of his bull neck with a calloused palm. "What do you want me to do?" he asked warily.

"I cannot tell you, here," Tamar said. "Come with me to my quarters and I will explain. You will be well rewarded for your work."

The guard's wide face lighted up. "Then I'm your man," he rumbled. "Lead the way."

A few minutes later, Tamar, with Fordak in tow, opened the door of the building set aside for him and his companions.

Jotan and Javan were still sleeping. Tamar closed the door and dropped the bar into place.

"Sit down," he told Fordak, pointing to a stool. He crossed the room and prodded the sleeping pair into wakefulness.

"Jotan and Javan," he said, when the two had risen, "this is Fordak, one of Sephar's finest warriors. Fordak is going to help us in a little matter, aren't you, Fordak?"

The guard nodded, his broad cheeks creased with a wide smile at being treated so familiarly by a nobleman.

Jotan was staring at his friend in frank bewilderment.

"What are you getting at, Tamar?" he asked. "Why have you brought this man here?"

"Yes," Tamar went on, ignoring the questions. "Fordak is going to do a great deal for us. To begin with—" he dropped a hand lightly on the man's shoulder "—he is going to tell us *what he did with the slave-girl, Dylara!*"

As Tamar spoke the last few words his fingers bit fiercely into the bare flesh beneath his hand.

The speed with which Fordak lost his smile was almost laughable. He bellowed out something unintelligible and started to rise; but Jotan, his face suddenly white beneath its tan, crossed the room with a single bound and slammed him back on the stool.

Tamar flipped a knife from its sheath and pressed the point lightly against Fordak's spine. "Sit still, you!" he said frostily.

Jotan's face was haggard. "Has anything happened to Dylara?" he asked thickly. "In the name of the God, Tamar, tell me quickly."

"Just this," Tamar said. "While you and Javan were asleep I went to the palace to . . . on a personal matter. While there, I learned that Dylara had been taken from the slave quarters by this man on the pretext of taking her to Urim. Another man helped him;

who, I don't know. Knowing you would be interested in learning what had happened to her, I brought our friend, here, along to answer your questions."

JOTAN thanked him with a glance. Then he turned to the seated Fordak.

"All right," he ground out savagely, "what have you done with her?"

Fordak looked at him sullenly. "I don't know what you're talking about," he mumbled. "You have no right to keep me here."

Jotan, his face convulsed with anger, grabbed the man by the front of his tunic with one hand and shook him savagely. Fordak, struggling to twist loose, aimed a wild blow at his tormentor, and received in return a mighty smash full on the nose that knocked him to the floor, half conscious, blood pouring from his nostrils.

"Get up!" snarled Jotan. He kicked the dazed warrior brutally in the side. "Either that tongue of yours starts to wag or it comes out—by the roots!"

He reached down, caught a handful of Fordak's rumpled hair and pulled him to his feet. The guard stood there, swaying, and would have fallen had not Jotan shoved him back on the stool.

"Where is she?"

Fordak wiped his nose with the back of one hand and stared woodenly at the crimson stains left there. He knew he must tell; he could not bear further punishment.

And then he remembered what Meltor had said. The princess Alurna had wanted the girl disposed of; to tell what he knew would bring down the wrath of Urim's daughter upon him. He shivered at the thought; for he did not want to die.

"Where is she?"

Fordak moved his head in silent negation. "I don't know."

Jotan clenched his fist to strike again. Tamar caught his arm.

"Wait," he said. "Let me talk to him." He pushed back Fordak's head. "We know you're mixed up in this, Fordak. You and another guard took the girl from her room. Tell us where she is and you shall go free—as soon as we find you have told us the truth."

"I don't know," said the man stolidly.

Jotan swore impatiently. "I'm through wasting time," he said. "Dylara may be in danger. I'll get the truth from him."

He motioned to Javan. "Get me a fire bowl."

When his friend had handed him a bowl of fat, he lighted its wick with a glowing coal from an earthen jar and came back to Fordak. The seated man watched him, apprehension in his eyes.

The flame wavered in the faint breeze from the windows. It suddenly had become very quiet in the room.

Jotan drew the flint knife from his belt and began to run the blade back and forth through the candle's flame.

"What are you going to do?" Tamar asked.

The lips of his friend were pressed into a straight line. "He's going to talk. Be ready to listen."

Another minute passed. Jotan continued to move the knife blade to and fro in the heart of the fire. Fordak could not tear his eyes from the objects in the man's hands. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Tie his arms and legs," Jotan said.

THOSE words seemed to release Fordak's paralyzed muscles. Voicing a wild cry he bounded from the stool and was nearly to the door before Tamar and Javan brought him down. He con-

tinued to struggle frantically while they bound lengths of rawhide about his arms and legs. When he was securely tied they dragged him back to the stool.

Jotan said, "Take off one of his sandals."

Fordak yelled in terror and jerked back, almost falling from the stool.

"Stuff something in his mouth before he has half the city here."

Gagged and bound, Fordak was helpless to do more than gurgle and sweat as Javan knelt and bared one of his feet.

"Now," Jotan said grimly, "we'll see what effect this will have in getting information."

With a quick movement he placed the white-hot length of flint firmly against the delicate skin of the instep and held it there.

An eerie, muffled scream pushed past the gag in Fordak's mouth. So intense was the note of animal pain that the three men felt their flesh crawl with the sound.

Abruptly the bound guard stiffened, his eyes swam in their sockets, and he fell back in a faint.

Jotan rose and tossed the knife aside. "Get some water," he said. "One treatment like that should be enough."

They removed the gag from the unconscious man's mouth and doused water in his face. After a moment he groaned weakly and opened his eyes.

"Where is Dylara?" Jotan asked, for the third time.

Words came spilling out. "I—I'll tell you. Don't burn me again. I can't stand it. I'll talk. We took her —Meltor and I. Meltor made me help him take her. He said Alurna told him to do it."

"Alurna?" Jotan was astonished. "What had she to do with it?"

"She wanted it done. Meltor said she ordered him to take the girl to the house of Rydob outside Sephar. He was to take her there and kill her, then hide the body so no one would know what had happened to her."

Jotan paled. "Where is this house of Rydob?"

Fordak gave directions. When he had finished, Jotan said: "Tamar, get three or four of our men and meet Javan and me at the Gate of the Setting Sun. Hurry!"

Tamar went out.

"Get our weapons together, Javan," Jotan ordered. "We'll meet the others at the gate."

Javan was slow to comprehend. "Where are we going?"

"Into the jungle," said Jotan evenly. "To the house of Rydob!"

ALURNA had slept well during the mid-day heat. When she awakened, her first thought was of Meltor and his errand. Lying there, the room darkened against the blazing sun, she allowed herself to think of Jotan, smiling when she realized he was free, now, to fall in love with her. No longer was there a barbarian slave-girl to blind him to the beauty and charm of Urim's daughter.

After a while she sat up, stretched her soft muscles with all the sleek satisfaction of a jungle cat, and summoned Anela.

The slave-girl was aiding her in effecting a leisurely toilet a little later, when a brief rap sounded at the door.

"That must be Meltor," Alurna said contentedly. "Let him in, Anela."

But when the door was opened, it was another man who stood there, his tunic torn and stained, his broad plump face lined with suffering.

"It's Fordak!" cried Anela.

The man staggered to a stool and dropped onto it, exhausted.

"I came as soon as I could, prin-

cess," he babbled. "I came to tell you so you would not punish me. They forced me to tell; they burned me until I told them. I would have come sooner, but the ropes were tight."

Alurna shut him off with a gesture. "What are you trying to tell me?" she demanded. "*Who* made you tell *what*?"

"The men from Ammad." Fordak was beginning to gain control over his shaken nerves. "Jotan and Tamar and Javan. They tortured me until I told them where Meltor had taken the slave-girl."

Rapidly he related all that had taken place in the visitors' apartment. Being no fool, he exaggerated the amount of suffering he had endured; thus might the heart of Alurna be touched with pity.

When Fordak was done, Alurna went to the window and stood there, her back to the others, staring into the grounds below. What was she to do? Jotan was already on his way to the house of Rydob. If Meltor had wasted no time, Jotan could not possibly arrive soon enough to save Dylara from death.

But would Meltor do his work promptly? There was a cruel streak in the man—the same characteristic that made a leopard toy with a victim for hours before putting an end to its misery. And that girl had been very beautiful . . .

She turned. "You may go, Fordak."

The man was worried. "I could not keep from telling, princess. They burned—"

"Get out!"

Fordak got unhappily to his feet and limped from the room.

"Quick, Anela!" said the princess. "Get to Vulcar at once. I want five of his most trusted men to meet me at the Gate of the Setting Sun. Should he ask questions, tell him I will explain later. Go!"

"Where are you going, princess?" the slave-girl asked as she started for the door.

"Into the jungle," was the calm reply. "To the house of Rydob!"

* * *

SEVEN men stood in a group at the mouth of a trail. Behind them lay a tract of matted jungle, over them towered the branches of forest kings, and directly before them was a small clearing containing a rambling, one-storied building of gray stone, weather-stained and unkempt.

"That must be the place, Jotan," said one of the men. "It answers the description you gave us."

Jotan nodded. "They must still be in there. Otherwise we should have met this Meltor on his way back. If only we have arrived in time.

"We must spread out, then come up to the house from all sides. Two of you go with Tamar and circle around to the east. Keep within the jungle's fringe that you may not be seen from the house. The rest of us will close in from this side. You have five minutes to reach your places. Go."

The minutes dragged by. None of the four appeared to feel an urge to talk. A heavy silence had fallen on the jungle about them. Even the hum of insects, the voices of the gaily-colored birds, the chattering monkeys, were stilled. The same strange tenseness that precedes a tropical storm, an atmosphere of impending conflict, seemed to hang over them.

Jotan straightened. "They've had time enough. Come on."

The four men stepped into the clearing, spread fan-wise, and headed for the building, moving at a half-trot.

The door was closed. In absolute silence they stepped over the heap of bones that once had been Rydob, mounted the steps and halted there.

Carefully Jotan closed his fingers about the latch. The heavy planks swung inward enough to satisfy him that there was no bar in place.

Suddenly Jotan drew back and drove his shoulder against the wood with all his weight behind it. The door flew open and the four men came piling into the room, knives of stone held in readiness.

That mad rush came to an abrupt halt, and what the men saw brought a chorus of astonished exclamations from their lips.

Flat on his back in the center of the room, partially hidden behind an overturned table, lay Meltor of Sephar. From his left breast stood the hilt of a stone knife, its blade buried deep. He was quite dead.

The girl was gone.

(To be concluded next month)

PLANT TRICKERY

AS YOU all know, most plants require the services of some insect to spread pollen among other plants of the same species for reproduction. Well, the aristolochia vine or Dutchman's pyre, as it is commonly known because of its pyre-shaped flower, has a very unusual method of "hiring" an insect to spread its pollen.

The flower of this plant contains a sweet nectar, which is very enticing to most insects, especially bees. The insect enters the flower in search of a delicious meal not knowing that the inside of the flower is lined with stiff hairs that bend inward. These hairs do not keep an insect out of the flower, but once he has feasted and starts to leave the flower, these hairs bar his way with their sharp points.

The insect is kept a prisoner by the flower until its pollen ripens. The insect, in its desperate struggle to escape, covers himself with the golden pollen which is just what the plant has planned it to do. The hairs that held the insect prisoner now wilt and permit it to leave the flower, none the worse for its experience. The insect then goes in search of food and is usually attracted by the flower of another Dutchman's pyre. The insect enters the flower and fertilizes it with the pollen which it carries on its body.

Thus everyone is satisfied—the insect because it has had a good meal and the Dutchman's pyre because it has reproduced.

THE PARASITIC MALE

YOU all know of cases where a wife supports her husband, but did you know that among the deep-sea angler fish, the female always supports the male throughout their marriage?

This fish is a very odd one in many ways. The male only grows to about two inches long while the females reach a length of three or more feet. Unlike other fish, who think nothing of being bigamists or even "King Solomons," the male deep-sea angler is content with having just one mate.

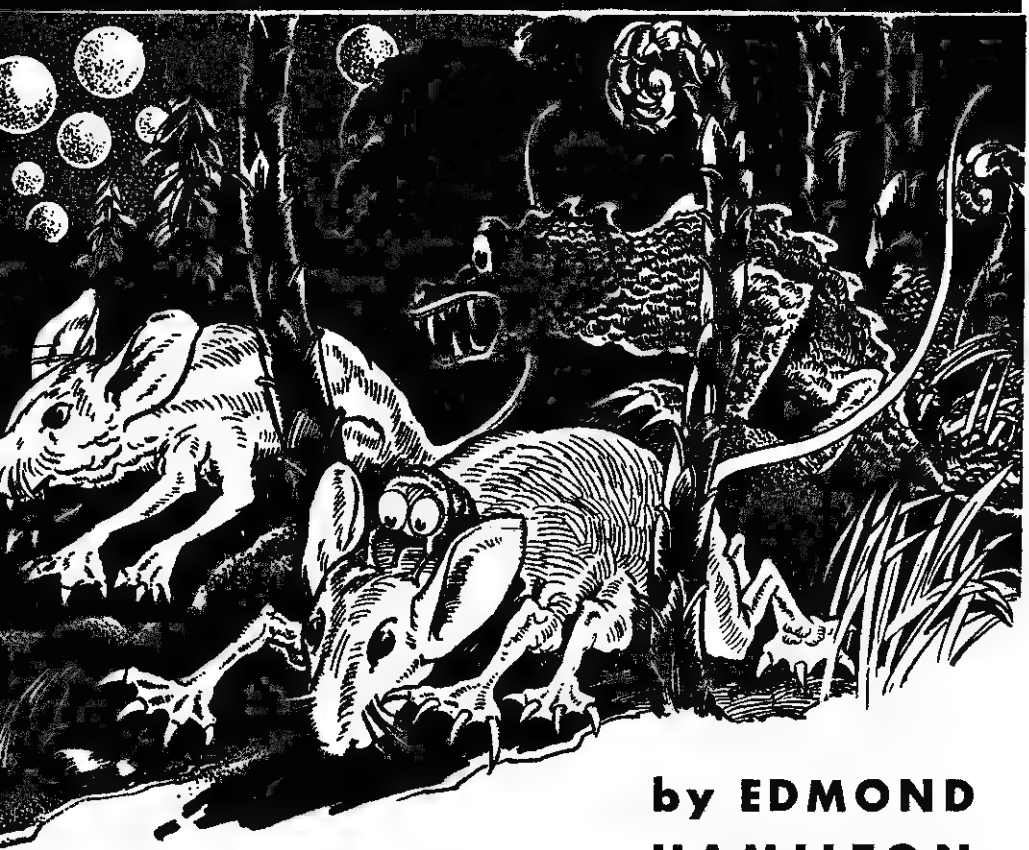
Upon finding his ideal wife, the male actually becomes "hitched" to his mate by attaching himself to her body with a small fringe of flesh. After marriage, the male becomes a parasite and "lives" off his wife. The female, being the only breadwinner, has been endowed by nature with excellent tools to obtain food.

From her mouth, which is over a foot wide, she dangles a long growth that has a tassel-like attachment at the end. To make this lure more attractive to curious fish the tassel has a natural light. The female then rests on the bottom of the sea waiting for her dinner to be attracted by her "neon" sign. Sure enough, she doesn't have to wait long, for very soon fish come nosing around to see the beautiful tassel with the light. When the fish least suspect it, the female moves the lure out of the way and gobbles up the fish. She then settles down to enjoy her meal, and the male, with his alimentary canal securely grown to his mate, also proceeds to enjoy his meal.

THE WORLD WITH A

The forest was a hell of vicious brutes

THOUSAND MOONS



by EDMOND HAMILTON

Grim death was the only romance to be found on this world that boasted a thousand moons

CHAPTER I

Thrill Cruise

LANCE KENNISTON felt the cold realization of failure as he came out of the building into the sharp chill of the Martian night. He stood for a moment, his lean, drawn face haggard in the light of the two hurtling moons.

He looked hopelessly across the dark spaceport. It was a large one, for this ancient town of Syrtis was the main port of Mars. The forked light of the flying moons showed many ships docked on the tarmac—a big liner, several freighters, a small, shining cruiser and other small craft. And for lack of one of those ships, his hopes were ruined!

A squat, brawny figure in shapeless space-jacket came to Kenniston's side. It was Holk Or, the Jovian who had

been waiting for him.

"What luck?" asked the Jovian in a rumbling whisper.

"It's hopeless," Kenniston answered heavily. "There isn't a small cruiser to be had at any price. The meteor-miners buy up all small ships here."

"The devil!" muttered Holk Or, dismayed. "What are we going to do? Go on to Earth and get a cruiser there?"

"We can't do that," Kenniston answered. "You know we've got to get back to that asteroid within two weeks. We've got to get a ship here."

Desperation made Kenniston's voice taut. His lean, hard face was bleak with knowledge of disastrous failure.

The big Jovian scratched his head. In the shifting moonlight his battered green face expressed ignorant perplexity as he stared across the busy spaceport.

"That shiny little cruiser there would be just the thing," Holk Or muttered, looking at the gleaming, torpedo-shaped craft nearby. "It would hold all the stuff we've got to take; and with robot controls we two could run it."

"We haven't a chance to get that craft," Kenniston told him. "I found out that it's under charter to a bunch of rich Earth youngsters who came out here in it for a pleasure cruise. A girl named Loring, heiress to Loring Radium, is the head of the party."

The Jovian swore. "Just the ship we need, and a lot of spoiled kids are using it for thrill-hunting!"

Kenniston had an idea. "It might be," he said slowly, "that they're tired of the cruise by this time and would sell us the craft. I think I'll go up to the Terra Hotel and see this Loring girl."

"Sure, let's try it anyway," Holk Or agreed.

The Earthman looked at him anxiously. "Oughtn't you to keep under cover, Holk? The Planet Patrol has had your record on file for a long time. If you happened to be recognized—"

"Bah, they think I'm dead, don't they?" scoffed the Jovian. "There's no danger of us getting picked up."

Kenniston was not so sure, but he was too driven by urgent need to waste time in argument. With the Jovian clumping along beside him, he made his way from the spaceport across the ancient Martian city.

The dark streets of old Syrtis were not crowded. Martians are not a nocturnal people and only a few were abroad in the chill darkness, even they being wrapped in heavy synthewool cloaks from which only their bald red heads and solemn, cadaverous faces protruded.

Earthmen were fairly numerous in this main port of the planet. Swaggering space-sailors, prosperous-looking traders and rough meteor-miners made up the most of them. There were a few tourists gaping at the grotesque old black stone buildings, and under a krypton-bulb at a corner, two men in the drab uniform of the Patrol stood eyeing passersby sharply. Kenniston breathed more easily when he and the Jovian had passed the two officers without challenge.

THE Terra Hotel stood in a garden at the edge of town, fronting the moonlit immensity of the desert. This glittering glass block, especially built to cater to the tourist trade from Earth, was Earth-conditioned inside. Its gravitation, air pressure and humidity were ingeniously maintained at Earth standards for the greater comfort of its patrons.

Kenniston felt oddly oppressed by the warm, soft air inside the resplendent lobby. He had spent so much of his time away from Earth that he had become more or less adapted to thin-

ner, colder atmospheres.

"Miss Gloria Loring?" repeated the immaculate young Earthman behind the information desk. His eyes appraised Kenniston's shabby space-jacket and the hulking green Jovian. "I am afraid—"

"I'm here to see her on important business, by appointment," Kenniston snapped.

The clerk melted at once. "Oh, I see! I believe that Miss Loring's party is now in The Bridge. That's our cocktail room—top floor."

Kenniston felt badly out of place, riding up in the magnetic lift with Holk Or. The other people in the car, Earthmen and women in the shimmering synthesilks of the latest formal dress, stared at him and the Jovian as though wondering how they had ever gained admittance.

The lights, silks and perfumes made Kenniston feel even shabbier than he was. All this luxury was a far cry from the hard, dangerous life he had led for so long amid the wild asteroids and moons of the outer planets.

It was worse up in the glittering cocktail room atop the hotel. The place had glassite walls and ceiling, and was designed to give an impression of the navigating bridge of a space-ship. The orchestra played behind a phony control-board of instruments and rocket-controls. Meaningless space-charts hung on the walls for decoration. It was just the sort of pretentious sham, Kenniston thought contemptuously, to appeal to tourists.

"Some crowd!" muttered Holk Or, looking over the tables of richly dressed and jewelled people. His small eyes gleamed. "What a place to loot!"

"Shut up!" Kenniston muttered hastily. He asked a waiter for the Loring party, and was conducted to a table in a corner.

There were a half dozen people at the table, most of them young Earthmen and girls. They were drinking pink Martian desert-wine, except for one sulky-looking youngster who had stuck to Earth whisky.

One of the girls turned and looked at Kenniston with cool, insolently uninterested gaze when the waiter whispered to her politely.

"I'm Gloria Loring," she drawled. "What did you want to see me about?"

She was dark and slim, and surprisingly young. There were almost childish lines to the bare shoulders revealed by her low golden gown. Her thoroughbred grace and beauty were spoiled for Kenniston by the bored look in her clear dark eyes and the faintly disdainful droop of her mouth.

The chubby, rosy youth beside her goggled in simulated amazement and terror at the battered green Jovian behind Kenniston. He set down his glass with a theatrical gesture of horror.

"This Martian liquor has got me!" he exclaimed. "I can see a little green man!"

Holk Or started wrathfully forward. "Why, that young pup—"

Kenniston hastily restrained him with a gesture. He turned back to the table. Some of the girls were giggling.

"Be quiet, Robbie," Gloria Loring was telling the chubby young comedian. She turned her cool gaze back to Kenniston. "Well?"

"Miss Loring, I heard down at the spaceport that you are the charterer of that small cruiser, the *Sunsprite*," Kenniston explained. "I need a craft like that very badly. If you would part with her, I'd be glad to pay almost any price for your charter."

THE girl looked at him in astonishment. "Why in the world should I let you have our cruiser?"

Kenniston said earnestly, "Your party could travel just as well and a lot more comfortably by liner. And getting a cruiser like that is a life-or-death business for me right now."

"I'm not interested in your business, Mr. Kenniston," drawled Gloria Loring. "And I certainly don't propose to alter our plans just to help a stranger out of his difficulties."

Kenniston flushed from the cool rebuke. He stood there, suddenly feeling a savage dislike for the whole pampered group of them.

"Beside that," the girl continued, "we chose the cruiser for this trip because we wanted to get off the beaten track of liner routes, and see something new. We're going from here out to Jupiter's moons."

Kenniston perceived that these bored, spoiled youngsters were out here hunting for new thrills on the interplanetary frontier. His dislike of them increased.

A clean-cut, sober-faced young man who seemed older and more serious than the rest of the party, was speaking to the heiress.

"Unhardened space-travellers like us are likely to get hit by gravitation paralysis out in the outer planets, Gloria," he was saying to the heiress. "I don't think we ought to go farther out than Mars."

Gloria looked at him mockingly. "If you're scared, Hugh, why did you leave your nice safe office on Earth and come along with us?"

The chubby youth called Robbie laughed loudly. "We all know why Hugh Murdock came along. It's not thrills he wants—it's you, Gloria."

They were all ignoring Kenniston now. He felt that he had been dismissed but he was desperately reluctant to lose his last hope of getting a ship. Somehow he *must* get that cruiser!

A stratagem occurred to him. If these spoiled scions wouldn't give up their ship, at least he might induce them to go where he wanted.

Kenniston hesitated. It would mean leading them all into the deadliest kind of peril. But a man's life depended on it. A man who was worth all these rich young wastrels put together. He decided to try it.

"Miss Loring, if it's thrills you're after, maybe I can furnish them," Kenniston said. "Maybe we can team up on this. How would you like to go on a voyage after the biggest treasure in the System?"

"Treasure?" exclaimed the heiress surprisedly. "Where is it?"

They were all leaning forward, with quick interest. Kenniston saw that his bait had caught them.

"You've heard of John Dark, the notorious space-pirate?" he asked.

Gloria nodded. "Of course. The telenews was full of his exploits until the Patrol caught and destroyed his ship a few weeks ago."

Kenniston corrected her. "The Patrol caught up to John Dark's ship in the asteroid, but didn't completely destroy it. They gunned the pirate craft to a wreck in a running fight. But Dark's wrecked ship drifted into a dangerous zone of meteor swarms where they couldn't follow."

"I remember now—that's what the telenews said," conceded the heiress. "But Dark and his crew were undoubtedly killed, they said."

"John Dark," Kenniston went on, "looted scores of ships during his career. He amassed a hoard of jewels and precious metals. And he kept it right with him in his ship. That treasure's still in that lost wreck."

"How do you know?" asked Hugh Murdock bluntly.

"Because I found the lost wreck of

Dark's ship myself," Kenniston answered. He hated to lie like this, but knew that he had no choice.

HE plunged on. "I'm a meteor-miner by profession. Two weeks ago my Jovian partner and I were prospecting in the outer asteroid zone in our little rocket. Our air-tanks got low and to replenish them, we landed on the asteroid Vesta. That's the big asteroid they call the World with a Thousand Moons, because it's circled by a swarm of hundreds of meteors.

"It's a weird, jungled little world, inhabited by some very queer forms of life. In landing, my partner and I noticed where some great object had crashed down into the jungle. We discovered it was the wreck of John Dark's ship. The wreck had drifted until it crashed on Vesta, almost completely burying itself in the ground. No one was alive on it, of course."

Kenniston concluded. "We knew Dark's treasure must still be in the buried wreck. But it would take machinery and equipment to dig out the wreck. So we came here to Mars, intending to get a small cruiser, load it with the necessary equipment, and go back to Vesta and lift the treasure. Only we haven't been able to get a ship of any kind."

He leaned toward the girl. "Here's my proposition, Miss Loring. You take us and our equipment to Vesta in your cruiser, and we'll share the treasure with you fifty-fifty. What do you say?"

The blonde girl beside Gloria uttered a squeal of excitement. "Pirate treasure! Gloria, let's do it—what a thrill it would be!"

The others showed equal excitement. The romance of a treasure hunt in the wild asteroids lured them, rather than the possible rewards.

"We'd certainly be able to take back a wonderful story to Earth if we found John Dark's treasure," admitted Gloria, with quick, eager interest.

Hugh Murdock was an exception to the general enthusiasm. He asked Kenniston, "How do you know the treasure's still in the buried wreck?"

"Because the wreck was still undisturbed," Kenniston answered. "And because we found these jewels on the body of one of John Dark's crew, who had been flung clear somehow when the wreck crashed."

He held out a half-dozen gems he took from his pocket. They were Saturnian moon-stones, softly shining white jewels whose brilliance waxed and waned in perfect periodic rhythm.

"These jewels," Kenniston said, "must have been that pirate's share of the loot. You can imagine how rich John Dark's own hoard must be."

The jewels, worth many thousands, swept away the lingering incredulity of the others as Kenniston had known they would.

"You're sure no one else knows the wreck is there?" Gloria asked breathlessly.

"We kept our find absolutely secret," Kenniston told her. "But since I can't get a ship any other way, I'm willing to share the hoard with you. If I wait too long, someone else may find the wreck."

"I accept your proposition, Mr. Kenniston!" Gloria declared. "We'll start for Vesta just as soon as you can get the equipment you'll need loaded on the *Sunsprite*."

"Gloria, you're being too hasty," protested Hugh Murdock. "I've heard of this world with a Thousand Moons. There're stories of queer, unhuman creatures they call Vestans, who infest that asteroid. The danger—"

Gloria impatiently dismissed his objections. "Hugh, if you are going to

start worrying about dangers again, you'd better go back to Earth and safety."

Murdock flushed and was silent. Kenniston felt a certain sympathy for the young businessman. He knew, if these others did not, just how real was the alien menace of those strange creatures, the Vestans.

"I'll go right down to the spaceport and see about loading the equipment aboard your cruiser," Kenniston told the heiress. "You'd better give me a note to your captain. We ought to be able to start tomorrow."

"Pirate treasure on an unexplored asteroid!" exulted the enthusiastic Robbie. "Ho for the World with a Thousand Moons!"

Kenniston felt guilty when he and Holk Or left the big hotel. These youngsters, he thought, hadn't the faintest idea of the peril into which he was leading them. They were as ignorant as babies of the dark evil and unearthly danger of the interplanetary frontier.

He hardened himself against the qualms of conscience. There was that at stake, he told himself fiercely, against which the safety of a lot of spoiled, rich young people was absolutely nothing.

Holk Or was chuckling as they emerged into the chill Martian night. He told Kenniston admiringly, "That was one of the smoothest jobs of lying I ever heard, that story about finding John Dark's treasure. Take it from me, it was slick!"

The Jovian guffawed loudly as he added, "What would their faces be like if they knew that John Dark and his crew are still living? That it was John Dark himself who sent us here?"

"Be quiet, you idiot!" ordered Kenniston hastily. "Do you want the whole Patrol to hear you?"

CHAPTER II

Discovered

THE *Sunsprite* throbbed steadily through the vast, dangerous wilderness of the asteroidal zone. To the eye, the cruiser moved in a black void starred by creeping crumbs of light. In reality those bright, crawling specks were booming asteroids or whirling meteor-swarms rushing in complicated, unchartable orbits and constantly threatening destruction.

For three days now, the cruiser had cautiously groped deeper into this most perilous region of the System. Now a bright, tiny disk of white light was shining far ahead like a beckoning beacon. It was the asteroid Vesta—their goal.

Kenniston, leaning against the glassite deck-wall, somberly eyed the distant asteroid.

"We'll reach it by tomorrow," he thought. "Then what? I suppose John Dark will hold these rich youngsters for ransom."

Kenniston knew that the pirate leader would instantly see the chance of extorting vast sums by holding this group of wealthy young people as captives.

"I wish to God I hadn't had to bring them into this," Kenniston sweated. "But what else could I do? It was the only way I could get back to Vesta with the materials."

His mind was going back over the disastrous events since the day three weeks before, when the Patrol had caught up to John Dark at last.

Dark's pirate ship, the *Falcon*, had been gunned to a helpless wreck. It had, fortunately for the pirates, drifted off into a region of perilous meteor-swarms where the Patrol cruisers dared not follow. The Patrol thought every-

body on the pirate ship dead anyway, Kenniston knew.

But John Dark and most of his crew were still alive in the drifting wreck. They had fought the battle wearing space-suits, and that had saved them. They had clung grimly to the wreck as it drifted on and on until it finally fell into the feeble gravitational pull of Vesta.

Kenniston could still remember those tense hours when the wreck had fallen through the satellite swarm of meteors onto the World with a Thousand Moons. They had managed to cushion their crash. John Dark, always the most resourceful of men, had managed to jury-rig makeshift rocket-tubes that had softened the impact of their fall.

But the wrecked *Falcon* had been marooned there in the weird asteroidal jungle, with the alien, menacing Vestans already gathering around it. The ship would never fly space again until major repairs were made. And they could not be made until quantities of material and equipment were brought. Someone must go for those materials to Mars, the nearest planet.

John Dark had superintended construction of a little two-man rocket from parts of the ship. Kenniston and Holk Or were to go in it.

"You *must* be back with that list of equipment and materials within two weeks, Kenniston," Dark had emphasized. "If we stay castaway here longer than that, either the Vestans will get us or the Patrol discover us."

The pirate leader had added, "The moon-jewels I've given you will more than pay for a small cruiser, if you can buy one at Mars. If you can't buy one, get one any way you can—but get back here quickly!"

Well, Kenniston thought grimly, he had got a cruiser in the only way he could. Down in its hold were the berylloy plates and spare rocket-tubes and new cyclotrons he had had loaded aboard at Syrtis.

But he was also bringing back to Vesta with him a bunch of thrill-seeking, rich, young people who believed they were going on a romantic treasure-hunt. What would they think of him when they discovered how he had betrayed them?

"THAT'S Vesta, isn't it?" spoke a girl's eager voice behind him, interrupting his dark thoughts.

Kenniston turned quickly. It was Gloria Loring, boyish in silken space-slacks, her hands thrust into the pockets.

There was a naive eagerness in her clear, lovely face as she looked toward the distant asteroid, that made her look more like an excited small girl than like the bored, jewelled heiress of that night at Syrtis.

"Yes, that's the World with a Thousand Moons," Kenniston nodded "We'll reach it by tomorrow. I've just been up on the bridge, telling your Captain Walls the safest route through the meteor swarms."

Her dark eyes studied him curiously. "You've been out here on the frontier a long time, haven't you?"

"Twelve years," he told her. "That's a long time in the outer planets. Most spacemen don't last that long out here —wrecks, accidents or gravitation-paralysis gets them."

"Gravitation-paralysis?" she repeated. "I've heard of that as a terrible danger to space-travelers. But I don't really know what it is."

"It's the most dreaded danger of all out here," Kenniston answered. "A paralysis that hits you when you change from very weak to very strong gravities or vice versa, too often. It locks all your muscles rigid by numbing the mo-

tor-nerves."

Gloria shivered. "That sounds ghastly."

"It is," Kenniston said somberly. "I've seen scores of my friends stricken down by it, in the years I've sailed the outer System."

"I didn't know you'd been a space-sailor all that time," the heiress said wonderingly. "I thought you said you were a meteor-miner."

Kenniston woke up to the fact that he had made a bad slip. He hastily covered up. "You have to be a good bit of a space-sailor to be a meteor-miner, Miss Loring. You have to cover a lot of territory."

He was thankful that they were interrupted at that moment by some of the others who came along the deck in a lively, chattering group.

Robbie Boone was the center of the group. That chubby, clownish young man, heir to the Atomic Power Corporation millions, had garbed himself in what he fondly believed to be a typical space-man's outfit. His jacket and slacks were of black synthesilk, and he wore a big atom-pistol.

"Hiya, pal!" he grinned cherubically at Kenniston. "When does this here crate of ours jet down at Vesta?"

"If you knew how silly you looked, Robbie," said Gloria devastatingly, "trying to dress and talk like an old space-man."

"You're just jealous," Robbie defied. "I look all right, don't I, Kenniston?"

Kenniston's lips twitched. "You'd certainly create a sensation if you walked into the Spaceman's Rendezvous in Jovopolis."

Alice Krim, a featherheaded little blonde, eyed Kenniston admiringly. "You've been to an awful lot of planets, haven't you?" she sighed.

"Turn it off, Alice," said Gloria dryly. "Mr. Kenniston doesn't flirt."

Arthur Lanning, the sulky, handsome youngster who always had a drink in his hand, drawled. "Then you've tried him out, Gloria?"

The heiress' dark eyes snapped, but she was spared a reply by the appearance of Mrs. Milsom. That dumpy, fluttery woman, the nominal chaperon of the group, immediately seized upon Kenniston as usual.

"Mr. Kenniston, are you sure this asteroid we're going to is safe?" she asked him for the hundredth time. "Is there a good hotel there?"

"A good hotel there?" Kenniston was too astounded to answer, for a moment.

INTO his mind had risen memory of the savage, choking green jungles of the World with a Thousand Moons; of the slithering creatures slipping through the fronds, of the rustling presence of the dreaded Vestans who could never quite be seen; of the pirate wreck around which John Dark and half a hundred of the System's most hardened outlaws waited.

"Of course there's no hotel there, Aunty," Gloria said disgustedly. "Can't you understand that this asteroid's almost unexplored?"

Holk Or had come up, and the big Jovian had heard. He broke into a booming laugh. "A hotel on Vesta! That's a good one!"

Kenniston flashed the big green pirate a warning glance. Robbie Boone was asking him, "Will there be any good hunting there?"

"Sure there will," Holk Or declared. His small eyes gleamed with secret humor. "You're going to find lots of adventure there, my lad."

When Mrs. Milsom had dragged the others away for the usual afternoon game of "dimension bridge," the Jovian looked after them, chuckling.

"This crowd of idiots hadn't ought to have ever left Earth. What a surprise they're going to get on Vesta!"

"They're not such a bad bunch, at bottom," Kenniston said halfheartedly. "Just a lot of ignorant kids looking for adventure."

"Bah, you're falling for the Loring girl," scoffed Holk Or. "You'd better keep your mind on John Dark's orders."

Kenniston made a warning gesture. "Cut it! Here comes Murdock."

Hugh Murdock came straight along the deck toward them, and his sober, clean-cut young face wore a puzzled look as he halted before them.

"Kenniston, there's something about this I can't understand," he declared.

"Yes? What's that?" returned Kenniston guardedly.

He was very much on the alert. Murdock was not a heedless, gullible youngster like the others. He was, Kenniston had learned, an already important official in the Loring Radium company.

From the chaffing the others gave Murdock, it was evident that the young business man had joined the party only because he was in love with Gloria. There was something likeable about the dogged devotion of the sober young man. His very obvious determination to protect Gloria's safety, and his intelligence, made him dangerous in Kenniston's eyes.

"I was down in the hold looking over the equipment you loaded," Hugh Murdock was saying. "You know, the stuff we're to use to dig out the wreck of Dark's ship. And I can't understand it—there's no digging machinery, but simply a lot of cyclotrons, rocket-tubes and spare plates."

Kenniston smiled to cover the alarm he felt. "Don't worry, Murdock, I loaded just the equipment we'll need. You'll see when we reach Vesta."

Murdock persisted. "But I still don't see how that stuff is going to help. It's more like ship-repair stores than anything else."

Kenniston lied hastily. "The cycs are for power-supply, and the rocket-tubes and plates are to build a heavy duty power-hoist to jack the wreck out of the mud. Holk Or and I have got that all figured out."

Murdock frowned as though still unconvinced, but dropped the subject. When he had gone off to join the others, Holk Or glared after him.

"That fellow's too smart for his own good," muttered the Jovian. "He's suspicious. Maybe I'd better see that he meets with an accident."

"No, let him alone," warned Kenniston. "If anything happened to him now, the others would want to turn back. And we're almost to Vesta now."

But worry remained as a shadow in the back of Kenniston's own mind. It still oppressed him hours later when the arbitrary ship's-time had brought the 'night.' Sitting down in the luxurious passenger-cabin over highballs with the others, he wondered where Hugh Murdock was.

The rest of Gloria's party were all here, listening with fascinated interest to Holk Or's colorful yarns of adventures on the wild asteroids. But Murdock was missing. Kenniston wondered worriedly if the fellow was looking over that equipment in the hold again.

A YOUNG Earth space-man one of the *Sunsprite's* small crew —came into the cabin and approached Kenniston.

"Captain Walls' compliments, sir, and would you come up to the bridge? He'd like your advice about the course again."

"I'll go with you," Gloria said as Kenniston rose. "I like it up in the

bridge best of any place on the ship."

As they climbed past the little tel-audio transmitter-room, they saw Hugh Murdock standing in there by the operator. He smiled at Gloria.

"I've been trying to get some messages through to Earth, but it seems we're almost out of range," he said ruefully.

"Can't you ever forget business, Hugh?" the girl said exasperatedly. "You're about as adventurous as a fat radium-broker of fifty."

Kenniston, however, felt relieved that Murdock had apparently forgotten about the oddness of the equipment below. His spirits were lighter when they entered the glassite-enclosed bridge.

Captain Walls turned from where he stood beside Bray, the chief pilot. The plump, cheerful master touched his cap to Gloria Loring.

"Sorry to bother you again, Mr. Kenniston," he apologized. "But we're getting pretty near Vesta, and you know this devilish region of space better than I do. The charts are so vague they're useless."

Kenniston glanced at the instrument-panel with a practiced eye and then squinted at the void ahead. The *Sunsprite* was now throbbing steadily through a starry immensity whose hosts of glittering points of light would have made a bewildering panorama to laymen's eyes.

They seemed near none of those blazing sparks. Yet every few minutes, red lights blinked and buzzers sounded on the instrument panel. At each such warning of the meteorometers, the pilot glanced quickly at their direction-dials and then touched the rocket-throttles to change course slightly. The cruiser was threading a way through unseen but highly perilous swarms of rushing meteors and scores of thundering asteroids.

Vesta was now a bright, pale-green disk like a little moon. It was not directly ahead, but lay well to the left. The cruiser was following an indirect course that had been laid to detour it well around one of the bigger meteor-swarms that was spinning rapidly toward Mars.

"What about it, Mr. Kenniston—is it safe to turn toward Vesta now?" Captain Walls asked anxiously. "The chart doesn't show any more swarms that should be in this region now, by my calculations."

Kenniston snorted. "Charts are all made by planet-lubbers. There's a small swarm that tags after that big No. 480 mess we just detoured around. Let me have the 'scopes and I'll try to locate it."

Using the meteorscopes whose sensitive electromagnetic beams could probe far out through space, to be reflected by any matter, Kenniston searched carefully. He finally straightened from the task.

"It's all right—the tag-swarm is on the far side of No. 480," he reported. "It should be safe to blast straight toward Vesta now."

The captain's anxiety was only partly assuaged. "But when we reach the asteroid, what then? How do we get through the satellite-swarm around it?"

"I can pilot you through that," Kenniston assured him. "There's a periodic break in that swarm, due to gravitational perturbations of the spinning meteor-moons. I know how to find it."

"Then I'll wake you up early tomorrow 'morning' before we reach Vesta," vowed Captain Walls. "I've no hankering to run that swarm myself."

"We'll be there in the morning?" exclaimed Gloria with eager delight. "How long then will it take us to find the pirate wreck?"

Kenniston uncomfortably evaded

the question. "I don't know—it shouldn't take long. We can land in the jungle near the wreck."

His feeling of guilt was increased by her enthusiastic excitement. If she and the others only knew what the morrow was to bring them!

HE DID not feel like facing the rest of them now, and lingered on the dark deck when they went back down from the bridge. Gloria remained beside him instead of going on to the cabin.

She stood, with the starlight from the transparent deck-wall falling upon her youthfal face as she looked up at him.

"You *are* a moody creature, you know," she told Kenniston lightly. "Sometimes you're almost human—then you get all dark and grim again."

Kenniston grinned despite himself. Her voice came in mock surprise. "Why, it can actually smile! I can't believe my eyes."

Her clear young face was provocatively close, the faint perfume of her dark hair in his nostrils. He knew that she was deliberately flirting with him, perhaps mostly out of curiosity.

She expected him to kiss her, he knew. Damn it, he *would* kiss her! He did so, half ironically. But the ironic amusement faded out of his mind somehow at the oddly shy contact of her soft lips.

"Why, you're just a kid," he muttered. "A little kid masquerading as a bored, sophisticated young lady."

Gloria stiffened with anger. "Don't be silly! I've kissed men before. I just wanted to find out what you were really like."

"Well, what did you find out?"

Her voice softened. "I found out that you're not as grim as you look. I think you're just lonely."

The truth of that made Kenniston wince. Yes, he was lonely enough, he thought somberly. All his old spacemates, passing one by one—

"Don't you have anyone?" Gloria was asking him wonderingly.

"No family, except my kid brother Ricky," he answered heavily. "And most of my old space-partners are either dead or else worse—lying in the grip of gravitation-paralysis."

Memory of those old partners reestablished Kenniston's wavering resolution. He mustn't let them down! He must go through with delivering this cruiser's cargo to John Dark, no matter what the consequences.

He thrust the girl almost roughly from him. "It's getting late. You'd better turn in like the others."

But later, in his bunk in the little cabin he shared with Holk Or, Kenniston found memory of Gloria a barrier to sleep. The shy touch of her lips refused to be forgotten. What would she think of him by tomorrow?

He slept, finally. When he awakened, it was to realization that someone had just sharply spoken his name. He knew drowsily it was 'morning' and thought at first that Captain Wall had sent someone to awaken him.

Then he stiffened as he saw who had awakened him. It was Hugh Murdock. The young businessman's sober face was grim now, and he stood in the doorway of the cabin with a heavy atom-pistol in his hand.

"Get up and dress, Kenniston," Murdock said sternly. "And wake up your fellow-pirate, too. If you make a wrong move I'll kill you both."

CHAPTER III

Through the Meteor-Moons

KENNISTON went cold with dismay. He told himself numbly that

it was impossible Hugh Murdock could have discovered the truth. But the grim expression on Murdock's face and the naked hate in his eyes were explainable on no other grounds.

The young businessman's finger was tense on the trigger of the atom-pistol. Resistance would be senseless. Mechanically, Kenniston slipped from his bunk and threw on his slacks and space-jacket. Holk Or was doing the same, the big Jovian's battered green face almost ludicrous in astonishment.

"Now perhaps you'll tell us what this means," Kenniston said harshly, his mind racing. "Have you lost your senses?"

"I've just come to them, Kenniston," rapped Murdock. "What fools we all were, not to guess that you two belong to Dark's pirates!"

Kenniston's lips tightened. It was clear now that Murdock had actually discovered something. From Holk Or came an angry roar.

"Devils of Pluto, I'm no pirate!" the big Jovian lied magnificently. "Whatever gave you this crazy idea?"

Murdock's hard face did not relax. He waved the atom-pistol. "Go into the main cabin," he ordered. "Walk ahead of me."

Helplessly, Kenniston and Holk Or obeyed. His mind was desperate as he shouldered down the corridor. The throbbing of the rockets told him the *Sunsprite* was still forging through the void. They must be very near Vesta by now—and now this had to happen!

The others had been awakened by the uproar and streamed into the main cabin after Murdock and his two prisoners. Kenniston glimpsed Gloria, slim in a silken negligee, her dark eyes round with amazement.

"Hugh, have you gone crazy?" she exclaimed stupefiedly.

Murdock answered without looking toward her "I've found out the truth, Gloria. These men belong to John Dark's crew. They were taking us into a trap."

"Holy smoke!" gasped Robbie Boone, his jaw sagging as the chubby youth stared at Kenniston and Holk Or. "They're pirates?"

"I think you must be losing your mind!" Gloria stormed at Hugh Murdock. "This is ridiculous."

Holk Or yawned elaborately. "Space-sickness hits people in queer *ways, Miss Loring," the Jovian told* Gloria confidentially. "Some it just makes sick, but others it makes delirious."

"I'm not delirious, and you two know it," Murdock retorted grimly. He spoke to Gloria and the others, without taking his eyes or the muzzle of his pistol off his two captives.

"I thought from the first that this Kenniston's story of finding the wreck of Dark's ship on Vesta was a thin one," Murdock declared. "And yesterday my suspicions were increased when I went down and looked over the cargo of equipment they brought. It's not equipment to dig out a buried wreck. It's equipment to *repair* a damaged ship—John Dark's ship!

"Suspecting that, last 'night' I sent a telaudiogram to Patrol headquarters at Earth. I gave full descriptions of Kenniston and this Jovian and inquired if they had criminal records. An answer came through an hour ago. This fellow Holk Or has a record of criminal piracy as long as your arm, and was definitely known to be one of John Dark's crew!"

There was an incredulous gasp from the others. Murdock still grimly watched Kenniston and the Jovian as he concluded.

"The Patrol hasn't yet sent through

Kenniston's record, but it's obvious enough that he's one of Dark's men too, and that his story that he and the Jovian are meteor-miners is a flat lie."

"I can't understand this," muttered young Arthur Lanning, staring. "If they're Dark's men, why should they induce us to go to Vesta?"

"Can't you see?" said Hugh Murdock. "John Dark's ship did crash on Vesta after being wrecked—that must be true enough. But Dark and his pirates weren't dead as the Patrol thought. They had to have machines and material to repair their ship. So Dark sent these two men to Mars for the materials. The two couldn't get a ship there any other way, so they made use of our cruiser by selling us that treasure yarn!"

KENNISTON winced. He knew now that he had underestimated Murdock, who had put together the evidence quickly when his suspicions were roused.

Gloria Loring, looking at Kenniston with wide dark eyes, saw the change in his expression. Into her white face came an incredulous loathing.

"Then it's true," she whispered. "You did that — you deliberately planned to lead us all into capture?"

"Aw, you're all space-struck," growled Hulk Or, bluffing to the last.

Murdock spoke over his shoulder. "Call Captain Walls, Robbie."

"No need to—here he comes now!" yelped the excited youth.

Captain Walls, entering the cabin in urgent haste had eyes only for Kenniston in the first moment.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Kenniston!" the captain exclaimed relievedly. "I was just coming for you. We've reached Vesta! I've ordered the pilot to slow down, for I want you to pilot us through the swarm—"

The captain's voice trailed off. His eyes bulged as for the first time he perceived that Murdock was covering the two men with a gun.

"We're not going in to Vesta, captain," rapped Murdock. "John Dark and his pirates are on the asteroid—*alive!*"

Captain Walls' plump face went waxy as he heard the name of the most dreaded corsair of the System.

"Dark—living?" he stuttered. "Good God, you must be joking!"

Mrs. Milsom, her dumpy figure shivering and her teeth chattering with terror, pointed a finger at Kenniston and the Jovian.

"They're two of the pirates!" she shrilled. "They might have murdered us all in our beds! I knew this would happen when we left Earth—"

Kenniston's mind was seething with despair as he stood there with hands upraised. His whole desperate plan was ruined at this last moment.

He wouldn't *let* it be ruined! He would get this cargo of machines and materials to John Dark if it meant his life!

"Turn back at once toward Mars, captain," Gloria was saying quietly to the stunned officer. Her face was still very pale.

Kenniston, standing tense, had had an idea. A desperate chance to make a break, in the face of Murdock's atom-gun.

The captain had said that he had just ordered the pilot to slow down the *Sunsprite*. In a moment would come the shock of the braking rocket-tubes firing from the bows—

That shock came an instant after the wild expedient flashed across Kenniston's mind. It was only a jarring vibration through the fabric of the ship, for the pilot knew his business.

It staggered them all on their feet,

for just a moment. But Kenniston had been waiting for that moment. As Hugh Murdock moved his gun-arm involuntarily to balance himself, Kenniston lunged forward.

"The bridge, Holk!" he yelled as he hurled himself.

Kenniston's shoulder hit the captain and sent him caroming into Murdock. The two men sprawled on the floor.

Holk Or, with instant understanding, already had the door of the cabin open. They plunged out into the corridor together.

"Our only chance is to make the bridge and grab the controls!" Kenniston cried as they raced down the corridor. "We can keep them long enough to land on Vesta—"

Hiss—*flash!* The crackling blast of the atom-gun tore into the lower steps of the ladder up which he and the Jovian frantically climbed. Murdock was running after them as he fired, and there were shouts of alarm.

Kenniston and Holk Or burst into the glassite-walled bridge. Bray, the pilot, turned for a startled moment from his rocket-throttles.

Beyond the pilot, the transparent front wall framed a square of black space in which bulked the monstrous sphere of the nearby asteroid.

The World with a Thousand Moons! It loomed up only a few hundred miles away, a big, pale-green sphere encircled by the vast globuluar swarm of hundreds on hundreds of gleaming little meteor-satellites.

"Why -what—" stammered the pilot, bewildered.

Kenniston's fist caught his chin, and the man sagged to the floor.

"Bar the door, Holk!" yelled Kenniston as he leaped toward the rocket-throttles.

"Hell, there's only a catch!" swore the Jovian He braced his brawny shoulders against the metal door. "I can hold it a little while."

KENNISTON'S hands were flashing over the throttles. The *Sunsprite* was moving at reduced speed toward the meteor-enclosed asteroid.

The cruiser shook to the bursting roar of power, as he opened up all the tail rockets. It plunged visibly faster toward the deadly swarm around Vesta, picking up speed by the minute.

Rocking, creaking, quivering to the dangerous rate of acceleration Kenniston was maintaining, the little ship rushed ahead. But now there was loud hammering at the bridge-room door.

"Open up or we'll burn that door down!" came Captain Walls' yell.

Kenniston didn't turn. Hunched over the throttles, peering tensely ahead, he was tautly estimating speed and direction. His eyes searched frantically for the periodic break in the outer meteors.

There was a muffled crackling and the smell of scorched metal flooded the bridge-room. A hoarse exclamation of pain came from Holk Or.

"They got my arm through the door, damn them!" cursed the Jovian. "Hurry, Kenniston!"

Kenniston was driving the *Sunsprite* full speed toward the whirling cloud of meteors around the asteroid. He had spotted the break in the cloud, the periodic opening caused by the gravitational influence of another nearby asteroid.

It was not a real opening. It was merely a small area in the swarm where the rushing meteors were not so thick, and where a ship had a chance to worm through by careful piloting.

Kenniston only remotely heard the struggle that Holk Or was putting up to hold the door against the hammering crowd outside. His mind was wholly

intent on the desperately ticklish piloting at hand.

He cut speed and eased the *Sunsprite* down into that thinner area of the meteor-swarm. Space around them now seemed buzzing with rushing, brilliant little moons.

The meteorometers had gone crazy, blinking and buzzing unceasing warning, their needles bobbing all over the direction-dials. Instruments were useless here—he had to work by sight alone. He eased the cruiser lower through the swarm, his fingers flashing over the throttles, using quick bursts of the rockets to veer aside from the bright, rushing meteors.

"Hurry!" yelled Holk Or hoarsely again, over the tumult. "I can't—hold them out much longer—"

Down and down went the *Sunsprite* through the maze of meteor-moons, twisting, turning, dropping ever lower toward the green asteroid.

A last gasping shout from Holk Or, and the door crashed off its burned-through hinges. Kenniston, unable to turn from the life-or-death business of threading the swarm, heard the Jovian fighting furiously.

Next moment a hand gripped Kenniston's shoulder and tore him away from the controls. It was Murdock, his eyes blazing, his gun raised.

"Raise your hands or I'll kill you, Kenniston!" he cried.

"Let me go!" yelled Kenniston, struggling to get back to the throttles. "You *fool!*"

He had just glimpsed the jagged moonlet rushing obliquely toward them from the left, bulking suddenly big and monstrous.

Crash! The shock flung them from their feet, and the *Sunsprite* gyrated crazily in space. There was a blood-chilling shriek of outrushing air from the fore part of the ship, and the slam-slam-slam of the automatic air-doors closing, down there.

The cruiser's whole bows had been crushed in by the glancing blow of the meteor. Now, ironically, the ship was falling clear of the meteor-swarm for Kenniston's piloting had almost won through it before the impact. But the *Sunsprite* was falling helplessly, turning over and over as it plunged down toward the green surface of the jungled asteroid.

"MY GOD, we're struck!" came Captain Wall's thin yell.

"This is your fault!" Murdock blazed at Kenniston. "You damned pirates will die for this!"

"Let me at those controls or we'll all die together in five minutes!" Kenniston cried. "We'll crash to smithereens unless I can make a tail-tube landing –"

Heedless of Murdock's gun, he jumped to the controls. His hands flew over the throttles, firing desperate quick bursts of the tail rocket-tubes to bring them out of the spin in which they were falling.

The brake-rockets in the bow were gone. The ship was crippled, almost impossible to handle. And the dark green jungles of Vesta's surface were rushing upward with appalling speed.

Kenniston's frantic efforts brought the *Sunsprite* out of the spin. By firing the lateral rockets, he kept it falling tail-downward.

"We're goners!" yelled someone in the stricken ship. "We're going to crash!"

Air was screaming outside the plummeting ship. Kenniston, his hands superhumanly tense on the throttles, mechanically estimated their distance from the uprushing green jungles.

He glimpsed a little black lake in the jungle, and near it the big circle of

an electrified stockade. He recognized it—John Dark's camp!

Then, a thousand feet above the jungle, Kenniston's hands jerked open the throttles. The tail rockets spouted fire downward.

Sickening shock of the sudden check almost hurled him away from the controls. His hands jabbed the throttles in and out with lightning rapidity, checking their further fall with one quick burst after another.

A sound of rending branches—a staggering sidewise shock that flung him from his feet. A jarring thump, then silence. They had landed.

CHAPTER IV

The Vestans

KENNISTON picked himself up groggily. The others in the bridge had been thrown against walls or floor by the shock, but seemed no more than bruised. Holk Or was nursing his burned arm. But Hugh Murdock, staggering in a corner, still held his atom-pistol trained on Kenniston and the Jovian.

"My God, what a landing!" exclaimed Captain Walls, his plump face still white. "I thought we were done for."

"Maybe we still are," Murdock said grimly. He said savagely to Kenniston, "You think you've won, don't you? Because you've managed to crash us on this asteroid where your priate boss is waiting?"

"Listen, Murdock—," Kenniston began desperately.

"Keep your hands up or I'll kill you both!" blazed Murdock. "March down to the main cabin."

Kenniston and the Jovian obeyed. The *Sunsprite* was lying sharply canted on its side, and it was difficult to scramble down through the tilted passageways and decks to the big main cabin.

The cabin was a scene of confusion, for it was impossible to stand upright on its tilted floor. Young Arthur Lanning had been stunned, and Gloria Loring and the scared blonde girl, Alice Krim, were bathing his bruised forehead. Robbie Boone was peering wildly through a porthole at the sunlit tangle of green jungle outside. From Mrs. Milsom came a shrill, steady wail of terror.

"Stop that screeching," Murdock told the dumpy dowager brutally. "You're not hurt. Gloria, are you others all right?"

Gloria raised her white face from her task. "Only bruised, Hugh."

She did not look at Kenniston or the big Jovian as she spoke.

Robbie Boone's teeth were chattering. "Murdock, what are we going to do? We're wrecked, on this hellish jungle asteroid—"

Murdock paid the frightened, chubby youth no attention. Captain Walls, Bray, and four of the crew were entering the cabin. The captain and pilot had belted on atom-pistols.

Captain Walls' plump face was paler. "Two of the crew were killed and our telaudio wrecked by that meteor," he reported. He glared at Kenniston. "You damned pirate! You're responsible for this!"

"If you hadn't dragged me away from the controls, the cruiser wouldn't have been struck," Kenniston denied. "And I'm not a pirate—"

Murdock interrupted. "We'll settle with those two later," he told the enraged captain. "Right now, we'll have to get out of the ship. We can't stay in here until we get it righted on an even keel."

Holk Or rumbled a warning. "Better be careful about going outside.

Those cursed Vestans are thick in these jungles."

"I'll have no advice from you two pirates!" flamed the captain. "Bray, you and Thorpe keep your guns on them every minute."

The heavy main space-door was opened. Pale sunlight and warm, steamy air laden with rank scents of strange vegetation drifted in. Outside lay a raw clearing the falling ship had crushed out of the jungle.

Captain Walls supervised as they all donned lead-soled weight-shoes to compensate for the weaker gravity. Then they emerged, young Lanning being supported by Murdock and Robbie. Kenniston and the Jovian were last to emerge, under the watchful guns of their guards.

The crew and passengers were looking around with wonder and revulsion. The silvery bulk of the *Sunsprite* lay awkwardly heeled on its side. The symmetrical torpedo shape of the cruiser was now badly marred by the crumpled condition of its bow.

ALL around them in the thin sunlight rose slender trees whose enormous green leaves grew directly from the trunks. This grotesque forest was made more dense by festoons of writhing "snake-vines," weird rootless creepers which crawled like plant-serpents from one tree to another. Each stir of wind brought white spore-dust down in a shower from the trees.

The few living creatures of this forbidding landscape were equally alien. Big white meteor-rats scurried on their eight legs through the brush. Phosphorescent flame-birds shot through the upper fronds like streaks of fire. In the pale sky overhead, there were ceaseless gleams and flashes of light as the spinning meteor-swarm reflected the sunlight.

"What a horrible place!" shrilled Mrs. Milsom. "We'll all die here—we'll never get back to Earth. I knew this would happen!"

"This is certainly a mean spot to be cast away," muttered Captain Walls. "God knows what queer creatures inhabit it, not to speak of the mysterious Vestans everybody talks about. And John Dark and his crew are somewhere here. And the telaudio wrecked, so we can't call for help."

Kenniston realized that none of the others had glimpsed Dark's camp as they fell. They didn't know the pirate encampment was only a few miles away in the jungle.

"What are we going to do, captain?" Gloria was asking, her face still pale but her voice quite steady. "Can we get away?"

Captain Walls looked hopeless. "We can't take off with the whole bow of the *Sunsprite* crushed in."

"We can repair it, can't we?" Hugh Murdock suggested. "Remember, in the hold is the cargo of machinery and repair-materials that Kenniston was bringing to repair Dark's ship. Can't we use that equipment?"

The captain looked more hopeful. "Maybe we can. Bray and the crew and I ought to be able to do an emergency job of patching the bow and installing new rocket-tubes there. But we'll have to work fast to get away before Dark's outfit learns we're here."

He pointed vindicatively at Kenniston. "Better lock up that fellow and his partner to make sure he doesn't signal somehow to his fellow-pirates."

Kenniston tried again to explain. "Will you all listen to me? I tell you, I'm no pirate!"

Murdock eyed him sternly. "Do you deny that John Dark sent you to Mars for repair-equipment, and that you told us that lying treasure-story to get the

equipment here in our ship?"

"No, I don't deny that," Kenniston admitted. "But I'm not one of John Dark's crew—I never was! I was a prisoner on his ship, captured by the pirates before they themselves were attacked by the Patrol."

"Do you expect us to believe that?" Murdock said incredulously.

"It's true!" Kenniston insisted. "My kid brother Ricky and I were captured by John Dark's outfit several weeks ago. We were prisoners on his ship when it was wrecked by the Patrol. After the wreck drifted onto Vesta here, Dark wanted to send someone to Mars for repair-equipment. He wouldn't send one of his own men in charge, for fear the man would double-cross him and never come back.

"So he sent me, his prisoner, on that errand. Holk Or came along to help me navigate a ship back. And I had to obey Dark and get the equipment back here at any cost. For Dark kept my brother Ricky prisoner here with him, and told me that if I didn't bring back that equipment, Ricky would be shot!"

Holk Or spoke up. "It's true, what Kenniston's telling you," rumbled the Jovian. "Me, I'm one of Dark's pirates and I don't care a curse who knows it. But Kenniston did this only to save his brother."

"I don't believe it," said Captain Walls flatly. "It's another of the smooth lies this fellow Kenniston makes up so easily."

GLORIA spoke to Kenniston, her dark eyes still accusing. "If what you say is true and you're not a pirate, then you brought all of us into this danger simply to save your own brother?"

Kenniston looked at her miserably. "Yes, I did. I was willing to lead you all into capture to save Ricky. But I had a reason—"

"Sure, you had a reason," Murdock said bitterly. "What did the safety of strangers like us mean to you, compared to your precious brother?"

Captain Walls motioned Kenniston and Holk Or angrily toward the ship. "Bray, take them in and lock them under guard in a cabin," he said.

Holk Or suddenly yelled. "Look out! There's a Vestan!"

Kenniston, his blood chilling with alarm, glanced where the Jovian pointed. At the west edge of the clearing, a small animal had suddenly emerged from the dense green jungle.

It was a six-legged, striped, catlike beast, not unordinary as interplanetary animals go. But its head looked queer, seeming to have a bulbous gray mass attached behind its ears.

Captain Walls uttered a scoffing exclamation. "That's only an ordinary asteroid-cat."

"That *is* a Vestan!" Kenniston cried. "Shoot at its head—"

His warning was too late. The catlike beast had launched itself in a spring toward their group.

As its striped body shot through the air, Walls triggered his atom-pistol. The crackling blast of force tore into the body of the charging asteroid-cat, and the beast fell heavily a few yards away.

But as it fell, the small gray mass upon its neck suddenly detached itself from the dead animal and scuttled swiftly forward. It moved with blurring speed toward Bray, the nearest to it of the group.

The little gray creature was no bigger than a man's clenched fists together. It was a gray, wrinkled featureless thing, except for pinpoint eyes and the tiny clawlike legs upon which it scurried. It reached Bray and ran

swiftly up his legs and back as he swore startledly.

Kenniston, made reckless of danger by his horror, yelled and lunged toward the pilot. Bray was swearing and trying to slap at the gray thing running up his back. But the little creature had now reached his neck. Clinging there, it swiftly dug two tiny, needle-like antennae into the base of his neck.

"Hold him!" Kenniston shouted hoarsely. "The Vestan has got him!"

Bray had undergone a sudden metamorphosis as the gray creature dug its antennae into his neck. His face stiffened, became masklike.

The pilot turned and began to run stiffly toward the jungle. Kenniston's leap almost caught him, but Bray lashed out a fist that sent Kenniston sprawling.

"Don't let him get away!" Kenniston yelled, scrambling up.

But the others were too stricken by amazement and horror to interfere in time. Bray had already plunged into the jungle and was gone.

"My God, what happened?" Captain Walls exclaimed dazedly. "Bray went clean crazy!"

His gun was pointing at Kenniston and Holk Or as though he held them responsible for what had occurred.

"He didn't go crazy, but he's lost now," Kenniston said heavily. "That little gray creature was one of the Vestans."

"But what did it *do* to him? That thing wasn't big enough to harm anybody."

"That's all you know about it," said Holk Or ominously. "Those little Vestans are the most dangerous creatures in the System."

"The Vestans," Kenniston added dully, "are semi-intelligent *parasites*. They live by attaching themselves to and taking control of some other creature's body. They do it by jabbing in those tiny, needle-like antennae to contact the victim's nervous system. Thereafter, the Vestan controls the victim's body absolutely. When the victim dies or is hurt, the Vestan simply detaches himself and fastens upon a new victim."

HORROR was on the white faces of the others. Murdock gulped and asked, "Then Bray—"

"Bray is beyond saving now," Kenniston said. "The Vestan parasite will control his body till he dies. The Vestans always like to attach themselves to human beings—they know that a man's body is more versatile in its capabilities than an animal's."

Twilight was beginning to descend upon the little clearing in the jungle, for the sun had gone down during the last few minutes. In the gathering dusk, the jungle loomed dark and brooding about them.

Overhead, the sky of this World with a Thousand Moons was burgeoning into its full glory. The hundreds of meteor-moons that spun across the heavens were shining brighter and brighter in the deepening dusk.

Captain Walls broke the spell of horror and dread. "We'd better get back inside the ship for tonight," he said nervously. "We can't do anything about repairs until tomorrow, anyway. By then we'll have figured out some way to deal with those devilish creatures."

Murdock said bitterly to Kenniston, "Bray's end is your fault, Kenniston. You brought him and us and these women into this place, all for the sake of that brother of yours."

"He'll stand trial for that when we get back to Mars," the captain vowed. "Even if he wasn't one of Dark's crew originally, by helping them he's made

himself a space-pirate, liable to execution."

Kenniston made no attempt to defend himself. He knew they wouldn't understand why he had sacrificed them for Ricky's sake, even if he told them.

He and Holk Or were locked in one of the little cabins, after it had been carefully searched. The crewman Thorpe was stationed as a guard outside their bolted door.

Holk Or, who had bandaged his burned arm, looked around the dark little cabin disgustedly. "This is a devil of a fix to get into!" swore the Jovian. "Here we've reached Vesta with the stuff, but can't let the chief know."

Kenniston asked him earnestly, "Holk, would John Dark really shoot Ricky if I didn't deliver the equipment? He said he would, but you know he needs Ricky."

Kenniston was clinging to this last shred of hope for his brother. John Dark and his pirates did need Ricky. For Ricky was a physician—Doctor Richard Kenniston of the Institute of Planetary Medicine.

That was why John Dark had spared the lives of the two brothers when he had captured them in the freighter in which they were returning to Earth from Saturn. Ordinarily, the pirate leader would have ruthlessly killed them as he killed all prisoners who were not rich enough to pay ransom.

But the fact that Ricky was a physician had saved them. The pirates needed a doctor. They had kept the two brothers prisoner on their ship for that reason. Kenniston and Ricky had still been on the *Falcon* as prisoners, when the Patrol had finally caught up to it and wrecked it.

"Dark knows that Ricky is a fine doctor and he needs a doctor," Kenniston repeated hopefully, to the Jovian. "Surely he wouldn't be foolish enough to shoot Ricky, even if I don't deliver the equipment."

"Kenniston, don't fool yourself," warned Holk Or. "The chief said he'd shoot him if you weren't back with the stuff in two weeks, and shoot him he will. John Dark never breaks his word."

That assurance sank the iron deeper into Kenniston's tormented soul. If that was true, and he knew in his heart it was, Ricky would die two days from now unless he'd delivered the repair-equipment to Dark.

He mustn't *let* Ricky die! Too much depended on his young brother's life. He must save Ricky even if it did mean the capture of Gloria and the others by the pirates. Better that they be held for ransom, than for Ricky to be killed!

KENNISTON got to his feet, rigid with decision. "Then we've got to get out of here," he muttered. "We've got to escape and take word to Dark that the equipment is here."

He continued quickly, "Holk, Dark's camp is only a few miles north of here. I spotted it as the *Sunsprite* fell."

Holk Or uttered an exclamation. "Why the devil didn't you tell me so! I figured it was on the other side of the asteroid, maybe, and that we'd never find it in the jungle even if we did get away."

"It still won't be easy for us," Kenniston warned. "The Vestans may get us in the jungle between here and Dark's camp. And anyway, how can we get out of this cabin?"

The big Jovian grinned. "That'll be easy. I'd have been out of here before now, only I was waiting for the ship to quiet down."

Kenniston stared. "That door is bolted. And there's no tool or weapon

in the cabin. They didn't forget a thing when they searched it!"

Holk Or's grin deepened. "They forgot one thing. They forgot how strong a Jovian is on a little, weak-gravity asteroid like this!"

CHAPTER V

Night Attack

KENNISTON caught desperately at the hope implied by the Jovian's words.

"What do you mean, Holk?"

"I mean that I'm a hundred times stronger on this little asteroid than I am on my own world, Jupiter. I can break the bolt of that door any time I want to."

"But there's an armed guard stationed outside it."

"I know, and that's where you come in, Kenniston. When I rip the door open, you be ready to jump the guard."

Kenniston considered swiftly. The chance of their getting out of the ship and safely through the jungles to the pirate camp, even if they escaped this cabin, seemed a slim one. Yet it presented the only possibility of delivering the equipment in the hold to John Dark.

The bitter irony of it struck Kenniston, for the hundredth time. He, Lance Kenniston, honorable spaceman for a dozen years, working desperately to aid the most notorious pirate in the void! Even drawing into danger the girl for whom he felt—

He shut Gloria out of his mind. He mustn't think of her now. He must think only of Ricky, and of what would be lost if Ricky died. He must risk everything, sacrifice everything, to prevent that loss.

"We might as well try it now," he told the Jovian in low tones. "The ship seems quiet."

"I'll do my best to make as little noise as possible," Holk Or muttered. "Are you ready?"

The Jovian's big hands grasped the knob of the door. Kenniston crouched a little behind him, every muscle tense.

Holk Or suddenly put all his gigantically magnified strength into a tremendous tug at the door. Its bolt snapped with a crack like that of a pistolshot, and it swung wide open.

The man on guard outside turned startledly, his hand darting to the atom-gun at his belt and his mouth open to yell. But Kenniston had launched himself like a human projectile as the door was torn open.

Kenniston's fist smashed the space-sailor's chin and the man sagged limp and unconscious with no chance to utter the cry on his lips. Hastily, Kenniston took his atom-pistol and eased him to the floor.

He and Holk Or listened tensely. The single sharp crack of the snapping bolt had apparently aroused no one. The ship was silent. All aboard were sleeping exhaustedly.

"Come on," Kenniston murmured tensely to the Jovian. "We've got to hurry to get to Dark's camp before night is over."

Holk Or chuckled. "The chief will welcome us with open arms when he learns we've got the equipment here for him."

Kenniston gripped the atom-pistol as they stole through the dark ship and out of the space-door. Outside, they paused in the darkness.

The scene was one of magic, unearthly beauty. The metal bulk of the cruiser and the towering jungle around the clearing were washed by brilliant silver light that fell from the wonderful night sky of this World with a Thousand Moons.

A thousand moons indeed seemed blazing in the canopied heavens overhead! The whole dark sky was crowded by the shining moonlets that rushed ceaselessly across the firmament with the spinning of the meteor-swarm of which they were part. It was like the glorious vista of a world seen in dreams.

But Kenniston was familiar with the unearthly spectacle. He led the way rapidly toward the northern edge of the jungle.

"We'll just have to plunge in and head north," he told the Jovian. "If we reach that little lake, we can soon find Dark's camp."

They started into the dense jungle, a fairyland of silver beams sifting through the choking fronds. Something scurried close by.

"Kenniston, shoot!" cried Holk Or instantly.

KENNISTON had already glimpsed the white beast scurrying toward them across a little patch of moonlight. It was one of the big meteor-rats. On its neck bunched one of the little gray masses—a Vestan.

The horror inspired by the hideous parasites tightened Kenniston's finger convulsively on the trigger of the atom-pistol. The crackling bolt of fire from the weapon ripped into the Vestan on the meteor-rat, and both parasite and animal victim were instantly a scorched, smoking heap.

"Hell, that's torn it!" cried the big Jovian. "We've roused the whole ship!"

Men awakened by the blast of the atom-gun were pouring out of the *Sunsprite*, rushing after the two escaped men. Kenniston heard Captain Walls shouting.

"They're in the jungle here! Spread out and surround them!" the officer was ordering.

Kenniston and the Jovian plunged forward, seeking to escape northward. But they had come up against an impenetrable abattis of brush.

Before they could find a way around it, they heard men crashing all around them. They were completely encircled.

"Kenniston, you and that Jovian walk back into the clearing with your hands raised or we'll blast every inch of the brush till we get you!" came the stentorian shout of the captain.

"The devil—they've got us boxed!" exclaimed Holk Or furiously. "We'll try to fight our way through."

"No!" Kenniston declared. "We couldn't make it anyway. And I'm not going to shoot innocent men."

Holk Or angrily grabbed for the atom-pistol, but Kenniston promptly threw it away. Not even in this last extremity could he bring himself to kill.

"You're a fool!" gritted the Jovian. "Now there's nothing for it but surrender."

With their hands raised, they walked out of the jungle into the brilliant silvery light of the clearing. Instantly they were surrounded by Captain Walls, Murdock and the other armed crewmen.

The girls and their scared chaperon, and young Lanning and Robbie Boone, were emerging in alarm from the *Sunsprite*. Kenniston did not look toward them.

Captain Walls' face was grim in the moonslight, as he and his men covered the two captured fugitives. "Kenniston, you and this Jovian were going to make your way to John Dark and tell him of our presence here, weren't you? You needn't deny it—it's plain enough."

"Sure we were!" exclaimed the angry Jovian. "We'd have made it, too, if a Vestan hadn't jumped us in the jungle."

"That would have meant capture of us all by Dark's pirates," said the captain grimly. "You two are a danger to us all, while you live. I'm going to remove that danger. As master of a space-ship, I have legal right to order summary execution of any space-pirates I capture. I'm going to order that now."

"You're going to kill them?" exclaimed Gloria. "Oh, no—you can't!"

"It's absolutely necessary, before they betray us to the pirates, Miss Loring," defended the captain. "They'd be sentenced to death by the courts if we took them back to Mars, anyway. But we daren't take a chance on keeping them prisoned that long."

"But just to shoot them down!" said Gloria horrifiedly. "I won't stand for that!"

Murdock took her by the arm. "It's space law, Gloria," he told her earnestly. "You'd better go back into the ship."

Kenniston stood silent in the moonslight, for he realized from the finality of Walls' voice that appeals would be utterly useless. There was no use trying again to explain why he'd been willing to betray them all to save Ricky. Even if they listened, they wouldn't understand.

He felt tired, crushed, old. He'd gone a long way in the last dozen years, but every mile of it had only led toward this ending. He was going to die here under the hurtling meteor-moons of Vesta, and that meant that Ricky and Ricky's dream were going to die soon too.

"I *told* you you were a fool to throw away that gun," Holk Or was muttering.

"YOU two march over there to the edge of the clearing," Captain Walls ordered grimly, gesturing with his gun. "Anything you want to say first, Kenniston?"

"Nothing that you would listen to or understand, you people," Kenniston answered dully. "No, I've got nothing to say."

A crackling voice came out of the dark jungle at that moment.

"*I* have something to say! Drop those guns, every man of you, and get your hands up!"

Walls spun around with an oath, levelling his atom-pistol. But out of the jungle crashed a streak of fire that hit the captain's arm and sent him reeling.

One of the girls screamed. Another of the *Sunsprite's* crew had tried to aim his weapon and had been cut down by a second bolt of atomic fire that had hit his leg.

"I *don't* want to kill you unless you force me to," came that crisp voice from the darkness. "You have ten seconds to drop the guns."

"That's the chief, Kenniston!" yelled Holk Or excitedly. "It's John Dark himself!"

The dreaded name of the pirate, a synonym for cold ruthlessness, reinforced the threat from the darkness.

Murdock let his weapon fall and shouted, "Drop the atom-guns, men! If we try to fight, the women will be hurt!"

The *Sunsprite's* men dropped their atom-pistols. Instantly out into the brilliant light from the jungle rushed a score of armed pirates. Martians, Earthmen, Venusians and others—this horde represented the criminal underworld of every planet in the System.

In a moment they had those in the clearing completely disarmed and lined up against the ship. All except Holk Or, who was loudly greeting his pirate comrades.

Kenniston saw John Dark coming

across the moonslit clearing toward them. The notorious pirate was a tall, bulky Earthman, but he walked with the lightfootedness of a cat in his moonshoes. His black hair was bare, and in the silver light his black-browed, intelligent face was coldly calm as his eyes searched the row of prisoners.

"So you finally got here, Kenniston. What about the repair-equipment?" he asked sharply.

Kenniston nodded toward the *Sunsprite*. "It's in the hold. We got everything you listed."

"Good!" Dark approved. "We saw your ship crash-landing today, and started this way at once. We've been beating through the jungle, fighting off the damned Vestans, until we heard the uproar going on here. What happened? Who are these people?"

Kenniston explained briefly how he had induced Gloria Loring's party to come on a pretended treasure-hunt. He was careful to stress the wealth of the party, and John Dark reacted as he had expected.

"If they're that wealthy, their families can pay big ransoms. You've done very well, Kenniston."

"What about Ricky?" asked Kenniston tensely. "He's all right?"

"Sure he's all right—he's up at the camp," Dark answered.

Gloria said bitterly to Kenniston, "You can congratulate yourself. You've managed to save your brother."

John Dark addressed her. "Miss Loring, I presume you and your companions are willing to pay ransom for your crew also? I never take prisoners, unless they promise a good profit."

"Yes, of course we'll pay the ransom of the crew!" Gloria agreed hastily.

"Good!" said the pirate calmly. "You'll not find your captivity any more irksome than necessary."

Mrs. Milsom, the dumpy chaperon, was goggling at the notorious pirate in an extreme of terror. A sardonic gleam came into Dark's eyes as he glanced at her.

"You're a handsome wench," he told the plump dowager with mock admiration. "I've half a mind to keep you and let the ransom go."

"No, no!" shrieked the terrified woman.

Dark burst into a roar of laughter. "All right, my shrinking beauty, we'll accept ransom for you."

He turned and shot efficient orders to his subordinates, who by now had gathered behind him.

"Get that stuff out of the hold, rig up power-sledges, and start freighting it up to the camp. You'll have to cut a path through the jungle—use atom-blasters to burn one out."

One of the pirates, a hard-faced Martian, said uneasily, "That will make a racket that'll bring every Vestan on the asteroid down on us."

"You can keep the Vestans off if you keep your eyes open," Dark retorted. "Get to work, now! We've got to get the stuff up there and repair the *Falcon* at once. I'll take these prisoners up to camp."

Kenniston was grouped with the other prisoners. With a strong escort of armed pirates guarding them, and Dark and Holk Or ahead, they started through the jungle toward the pirate camp.

CHAPTER VI

Asteroid Horror

THE pirate encampment was a big clearing hacked from the jungle a mile west of the little lake. In this space lay the long, looming black mass of the most dreaded corsair ship ever to sail the void. The *Falcon* had been

righted to even keel, but its crippled condition was evident in the fused, wrecked condition of its tail rocket-tubes.

The whole camp was enclosed and protected by a shimmering blue dome of electric force. This emanated from a heavy copper cable that completely encircled the clearing, and which drew its power from insulated cables that led into the ship to generators driven by the few cyclotrons still functioning. This protective electric wall had been set up at John Dark's orders to keep out the dreaded Vestans.

John Dark raised his voice as he and his men with their prisoners approached the shimmering wall of the camp.

"Kin Ibo! Drop the wall for us!"

They saw the hard-looking Martian who was Dark's second-in-command dive into the ship to turn off the power of the electric barrier. It died, and Dark's party entered the clearing. Then the electric wall sprang into being again behind them.

Kenniston looked swiftly around. There were a score more of the motley pirates here in the camp. Also, near the side of the looming black *Falcon*, were the small, rough log huts that Dark's men had constructed.

Dark's black eyes were triumphant as he told his Martian lieutenant, "Kenniston and Holk Or brought back the equipment all right, and also brought some people who'll bring big ransom. Their wrecked ship is a few miles south. You go down there with half the men here and help the others bring up the equipment."

Kin Ibo, looking a little apprehensively out at the jungle, obeyed. Dark motioned Kenniston and the other captives toward one of the huts by the big ship.

"That hut will be your quarters until we get the *Falcon* repaired," declared the pirate leader. "Any of you who try to leave it will be shot at sight. I hope you'll not be foolish enough to attempt escape."

"That's right, folks, you wouldn't have a chance," Holk Or told them earnestly. "Even if you could get out through the electric wall, the Vestans would get you. They're thick in the jungle around here."

They silently entered the hut. Its broad open windows admitted enough of the dazzling moonslight to brighten its interior.

A dark, eager-looking young Earthman sprang up as they entered, and rushed to pump Kenniston's hand.

"Lance, you got back safely!" he exclaimed. "Thank the Lord—I've been worrying myself almost crazy about you."

"How about you, Ricky?" Kenniston asked his young brother anxiously. "You're all right?"

Ricky Kenniston nodded quickly. "Sure, I'm okay. But things haven't been so good here, Lance. The Vestans have got a half-dozen pirates who ventured outside the wall in the last few days. These creatures literally haunt the jungles around here now—I think they've been drawn here from all over the asteroid."

Ricky looked wonderingly at Gloria and the others who were entering the hut. "Lance, who are all these people? Are they prisoners of Dark too?"

"Yes, we're prisoners," Hugh Murdock told him bitterly, with a savage glance at Kenniston. "We're prisoners because your brother sacrificed us all to get back here and save *your* neck."

"Lance, you didn't do that?" Ricky exclaimed in distress.

"I had to, Ricky," Kenniston protested. "It meant your life if I didn't."

"Of course," Murdock agreed iron-

ically. "What importance are we, compared to saving your young brother's life?"

Kenniston spoke slowly, to Murdock and Gloria and the others. "It wasn't merely Ricky's life at stake that made me sacrifice you all. It was more than that. I tried to tell you before, but you wouldn't listen."

KENNISTON went across the hut and brought back the square black medicine-case of his young physician-brother. He opened it, and out of the vials and instruments inside he took a square bottle of milky fluid.

"This is what I sacrificed everything to save," Kenniston said simply.

They all stared. "What is it?" Gloria asked, puzzled.

"It's Ricky's discovery," Kenniston said. "It's a preventative and cure for gravitation-paralysis."

Captain Walls, himself an old-time space-man, was first of the group to appreciate the significance of the statement. The captain gasped.

"A preventative for gravitation-paralysis? Kenniston, are you *sure?*"

Kenniston nodded gravely. "Yes. Ricky had been working on the problem a long time, back in the Institute of Planetary Medicine. He thought he'd found a way to prevent gravitation-paralysis, the most awful scourge of all the outer System, the thing that's doomed so many space-men. But his formula required rare elements found only in the outer planets.

"Ricky and I," he continued, "went out there and secured those elements. He made up this formula, and tried it on a gravitation-paralysis case — a space-man who's lain paralyzed for years. The formula was designed to strengthen the human nervous system against the shock of varying gravitations, to re-establish an already damaged nerve-web. And it worked."

Kenniston's voice was husky as he concluded. "It worked, and that living log became a man again. The formula was a success. Ricky and I started back for Earth, where he intended to announce the discovery and arrange for its manufacture on a big scale. But, on the way back, Dark's pirates captured us."

Kenniston flung out his hand in a tortured gesture. *"That's* why I went to any lengths to save Ricky's life! It's because Ricky is the only person who knows the intricate formula of this serum. If he were to die, the secret of the cure would die with him. And that would mean that thousands on thousands more of space-men would be stricken into living death by gravitation-paralysis in the future, just as so many thousands of old friends and shipmates of mine have been stricken in the past!"

Captain Walls was the first to speak. Quietly, the plump master of the *Sunsprite* extended his hand.

"Kenniston, will you shake hands with me? And will you forgive me for everything? You did absolutely right. I'm an old space-man and I *know* what gravitation-paralysis is."

Gloria's dark eyes were glimmering with tears. "If we'd only known," she murmured to Kenniston. "No one could blame you for sacrificing a lot of worthless idlers like us, for a thing like this."

"But you're going to be all right—all of you," Kenniston assured her. "John Dark will make you pay a big ransom, but you can afford that and you'll get back safely to Earth."

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Mrs. Milsom. "I can't understand all this scientific talk of yours, but I do know that that pirate chief means no good to me. Didn't you see the lustful

looks he gave me?"

The laugh that greeted this lessened the tension. Kenniston turned as Ricky plucked at his arm.

"What about ourselves, Lance?" Ricky asked quietly. "Dark still won't let us go, you know. He still needs me as a doctor."

Hugh Murdock stepped forward. "Dark would let you both go, for a big enough ransom. I'd like to pay it for you."

The handsomeness of Murdock's gesture moved Kenniston. He was only able to mutter his thanks.

WHILE Ricky was treating Captain Walls' burned arm, the officer kept looking fascinatedly at that square bottle of milky fluid.

He said hesitantly, "I've a son—back on Earth. For five years he's lain in a cot from the gravitation-paralysis that hit him out on Jupiter. Do you suppose—"

Ricky nodded. "Yes, Captain. I'm sure that we can cure him, now."

There was an uproar out in the clearing. Kenniston went to the door and looked out.

The electric wall had temporarily been dropped, and Kin Ibo and the main body of the pirates were hastily entering the camp with their improvised power-sledges that bore heavy loads of machinery and materials.

Kenniston heard Kin Ibo reporting shrilly to John Dark, "We lost two men to the Vestans on the way here—and nearly lost two more! All this activity has drawn them from all over the asteroid! Look at that!"

Outside the electric wall, which had been hastily re-raised, could be glimpsed the shapes of lurking asteroidal animals. Meteor-rats, big striped cats, flame-birds—and every one of those lurking animals bore attached to its neck one of the little gray Vestan parasites.

John Dark was saying harshly, "We've got to have the rest of those materials to repair the *Falcon.*"

"I tell you, it'd be suicide to try another trip through those jungles!" expostulated the Martian. "Those Vestans are devils!"

"Bah, you Martians are all alike—no good when your superstitions get aroused," snorted Dark contemptuously. "I'll take the men down myself. Come on, men—unload those sledges and we'll go back to the wreck."

His indomitable personality drove the scared, unwilling pirates into the task. Again the electric wall was faded out for a moment to let them out.

When they returned some time toward morning, Kenniston heard the crash of atom-guns heralding their approach. And when the wall was momentarily dropped, John Dark and his men stumbled into the camp with their loaded sledges in sweating haste.

"Turn on the wall again—quick!" bellowed Dark's bull voice. "The jungle's swarming with the gray devils now—they got five of us on the way back!"

Ricky, looking over Kenniston's shoulder, spoke appalledly. "Good God, Lance—look at them! I didn't know there *were* so many Vestans!"

Outside the barrier of shimmering electricity, scores of animals and birds dominated by the dreaded little gray parasitical creatures were now swarming. And their number seemed growing every minute.

"All this activity of the night has drawn the Vestans from far and wide," Kenniston muttered. "I don't like it. If that electric wall should fail, the creatures would be in on us in a moment."

Dark himself seemed to feel some-

thing of the same apprehension, for he was shouting urgent orders. "Hook up those atomic welders, and start putting the new plates into the *Falcon's* tail. Kin Ibo, have your gang fit in the new rocket-tubes. I'll see to installing the new eyes. If we work, we can get the job done by tomorrow night and get out of here."

Through the day, the pirates toiled with an energy that showed their earnest desire to leave the asteroid. That desire was reinforced by the ever-larger number of Vestans that now swarmed outside the wall.

There were literally hundreds of the gray parasites now outside the barrier. To have tried going outside the wall now would have been sheer suicide. The creatures were apparently driven by unholy eagerness to possess themselves of human bodies.

Gloria, looking out with Kenniston, shuddered deeply. "This horrible world! It's like a nightmare."

"We'll soon be away from it," Kenniston reassured. "See, they've almost finished repairing the *Falcon.*"

THE urgent toil of the pirates was showing results. By the time night came again, and the meteor-moonlets blazed forth with magic beauty in the dark heavens, the task of repair was almost done.

Kenniston and his companions had not ventured forth from the hut. Pirates were everywhere in the clearing, and all had heard John Dark's strict order to blast down the captives if they left their prison.

But from the hut, Kenniston and the others could see that the horde of Vestan-dominated animals around the camp had further increased. With ghastly avidity, they kept circling the shimmering, electric wall.

Kenniston turned in alarm at a ripping sound from the back of the log hut. Two of the logs were being torn out bodily. The battered green face and giant shoulders of Holk Or came through the opening.

"Kenniston, I came in this way because I didn't dare let Dark see me taking to you!" the Jovian excaimed. His face was urgent in expression. "I've found out that Dark doesn't mean to let your friends here get away from Vesta alive."

"What?" exclaimed Kenniston. "That's impossible! Dark said he was going to hold Gloria and the others for ransom."

Holk Or nodded hastily. "I know, and he meant it, then. But since then, he's found out something that's changed his plans. He found it out from me—like a big fool, I told him everything when he questioned me."

The Jovian continued rapidly. "I told him that Murdock had sent that telaudio message back to Patrol headquarters, asking about my record. Now Dark figures that the Patrol will come out here to find out if that message meant that some of John Dark's outfit had actually escaped.

"Dark wants the Patrol to keep thinking that he and his outfit were destroyed—so he can slip out to Pluto and prepare a new base. So Dark, when he leaves here, is going to drop Miss Loring and her friends by the wrecked *Sunsprite,* so the Patrol will find 'em dead by the wreck and will believe their cruiser crashed accidentally. That way, they won't go on searching as they would if Miss Loring's party was all missing. And Dark will have a chance to get out to Pluto without an alarm going out."

Kenniston was suspicious. "Why do you tell us this, Holk? You're one of the pirates yourself."

"I know, but I'm afraid Dark means

to drop *me* with the others by the *Sunsprite!*" Holk Or exclaimed. "He didn't say so, but I believe he figures on doing it so that the telaudio inquiry about me would be explained when I was found dead with the others by the wreck."

Murdock said swiftly, "The Jovian's right, Kenniston. All this is just what Dark *would* do, to hide his trail, now that he knows my telaudio message may have aroused the Patrol's suspicion."

Holk Or said emphatically, "I'm with you if you can figure out any way to take the *Falcon,* Kenniston!"

Kenniston paced to and fro. His whole mind was suddenly in a wild turmoil of stark fears. This meant death for Gloria and the others, and the ultimate responsibility for that death would be his.

"There is one possible chance for us to take the *Falcon,*" he muttered finally. "But my God, it seems like an insane idea—"

"Wait a minute!" Captain Walls interrupted. "Dark won't drop you and your brother to die, Kenniston. He still needs your brother as a physician. You two will be safe even if we are killed."

"What of that? I can't let Gloria and the rest of you be murdered! I was willing to sacrifice you when I thought it was only a question of your being held for ransom, but this changes everything," Kenniston said wildly.

"It doesn't change anything," the captain said firmly. "Your duty is to keep your brother alive at all costs, to save that formula that means life and hope for thousands of gravitation-paralysis victims like my son."

"You mean—I should let you all be killed so Ricky and I can be saved?" Kenniston cried. "I'm damned if I will!"

"We'll never do that!" Ricky Kenniston agreed warmly. "No formula in the world is worth that."

"*This* formula is," Gloria said earnestly to Kenniston. "The captain is right."

"I won't do it," Kenniston repeated. "I have an idea by which we might be able to take the *Falcon.* We're going to try it."

"Be reasonable, Kenniston," pleaded Hugh Murdock. "None of us except Holk Or has a weapon. What chance would we have against half a hundred armed pirates?"

KENNISTON looked at his brother. "Ricky, your formula strengthens the nervous system against any form of shock or damage, doesn't it? You said it did it by sheathing the nerves themselves with an impenetrable coating."

Ricky noddd puzzledly. "Yes, that's the principle. But how is that going to help us?"

"The Vestans," Kenniston reminded, "seize control of their victims by inserting those tiny needle antennae of theirs into the victim's nerve-system to establish contact. Wouldn't your formula insulate the nerves against such contact? Wouldn't it make a man immune to Vestan attack?"

"Why, it would!" Ricky declared wonderingly. "I never thought of it, yet it's entirely logical."

"Then," Kenniston said swiftly, "I want you to give every one of us, including yourself, an injection of the formula right now."

The driving purpose in his voice brushed aside all their bewildered questions and objections. Hastily, Ricky prepared his hypodermics and rapidly made an injection of the milky fluid into the big nerve-centers in the neck of each of them. Kenniston did the

same for Ricky himself.

"We *should* be immune now to Vestan attack," Kenniston said prayerfully.

"But what good's that going to do us?" Holk Or demanded. "Are you figuring to try an escape into the jungle?"

"No, I'm figuring on taking the *Falcon*—by using the Vestans," Kenniston replied. "Holk, can you get into the ship and turn off the power that keeps the electric wall going? Can you drop the wall?"

The Jovian's jaw dropped. "Why, sure, I could do that, but if I did, all those hordes of Vestans outside the wall will burst in here—"

He stopped, his eyes bulging. "Good God, then that's your plan? To let the Vestans in?"

"That's it," Kenniston said tightly, his face grim. "To let the Vestans in on the pirates. That'll give us a chance to take the ship—if the formula really makes us immune to the Vestans."

The terrible nature of the proposal stunned them all. But in a moment a flame of purpose lit in the Jovian's eyes.

"I'll do it!" he swore. "It's better than waiting for Dark to kill me like he's planning. You be ready!"

The Jovian slipped out of the opening in the back of the hut. They saw him presently, casually approaching the door of the *Falcon*.

John Dark stood, a tall, dominant figure in the moonslight, barking orders to the scores of pirates who were bolting in the last of the new rocket-tubes. Kenniston's eyes swung toward the shimmering electric wall, and the horde of Vestan-dominated animals outside it.

The wall suddenly died! And as the electric barrier vanished, into the clearing came rushing the swarm of asteroidal animals.

"The wall's down!" John Dark yelled, his atom-gun leaping into his hand. "Get back into the ship—get back—"

The crash of his atom-gun drowned his own shout. Other pirates were firing wildly at the hideous creatures assailing them.

For the little gray Vestans had detached themselves from their animal victims and were swarming upon the pirates, clambering with blurring speed up their legs and backs, sinking into their necks the tiny antennae.

Kenniston glimpsed John Dark, with a hideous little gray bunch now fastened to the back of his neck, drop his gun and stalk stiffly away toward the jungle. His face was an unhuman, lifeless mask—he was a human automaton, dominated utterly by the alien creature.

"Come on!" Kenniston yelled to his friends. "Now's our chance to get into the ship!"

THEY plunged out of the hut into the gruesome melee. Screaming pirates were now running into the jungle in vain effort to escape the hordes of Vestans. More than half the corsairs were now overcome.

Kenniston heard a scream from Gloria as they ran, felt a swift scurrying up his back, then the needle-like stab of antennae sinking into his neck.

But the parasitic creature did *not* overpower his will! He reached around, grasped and tore loose the hideous little thing, and with strong revulsion flung it to the ground.

"Your formula works, Ricky—we're immune to them!" he gasped. "But hurry!"

Other Vestans were clambering up on them like ghastly gray spiders as they ran, but were powerless to overcome them. They tore away the crea-

tures and plunged on.

Holk Or appeared in the door of the *Falcon,* his green face blazing as his atom-pistol pumped crashing fire into pirates inside the ship.

"I've got the ship cleared of them!" the Jovian shouted to Kenniston. "Let's get out of here!"

It was time they did so. Almost the last of John Dark's pirates had been possessed by Vestans and had become parasite-dominated robots stumbling off into the jungle. The remaining swarms of gray creatures were scurrying toward Kenniston's group.

They tumbled into the *Falcon* and slammed shut the space-door. The ship, completely if roughly repaired, was ready for take-off. Captain Walls and the men of the *Sunsprite* crew hastily started the newly-installed cyclotrons while Kenniston and the others raced up to the bridge.

Kenniston took the controls. He sent the big black pirate ship leaping up into the darkness upon flaming keel and tail-jets, and then it climbed steeply toward the wonderful sky of countless rushing moonlets.

By the time an hour had passed, the *Falcon* had groped out through the periodic break in the meteor-swarm around the asteroid. And it was throbbing at steadily increasing speed out into the vault of space, away from the World with a Thousand Moons.

"We'll head for Mars," Kenniston told the others. "We can report there to the Patrol."

"If you don't mind," Holk Or put in hastily, "I'd just as soon you dropped me at some asteroid before then. I've no desire to meet the Patrol."

Captain Walls told the Jovian, "Nonsense! After what you've done, you'll get a full pardon from the Patrol."

"You can count on it," Hugh Murdock told the doubtful Jovian. "We have some influence, back at Earth."

"Well, I guess I'll have to go honest, then," sighed Holk Or. "All the real pirate outfits are gone now, anyway." He shook his head heavily as he walked away. "The System sure isn't what it used to be."

Captain Walls was asking Ricky earnestly, "You're quite sure your formula will cure my son? All these years, I've hoped and prayed—"

"I'm certain," Ricky smiled. "Within a few weeks after we get back to Earth, gravitation-paralysis will be a thing of the past."

They moved off with the others. But Gloria lingered in the bridge with Kenniston.

"Where will you be going, after we get back?" she asked him quietly.

"Oh, back to space," he answered, a little uncomfortably. "There's nothing to hold me on Earth now that Ricky's work has succeeded."

"Nothing to hold you on Earth?" Gloria repeated. "That, I would say, is about the most ungallant speech on record."

He flushed. "You don't mean—that night on the *Sunsprite*—you weren't in earnest, surely—"

"Your passionate proposal is accepted," Gloria said calmly.

Kenniston was aghast. "But I didn't propose! I mean—I do love you, and you know it, but you're an heiress, and I—"

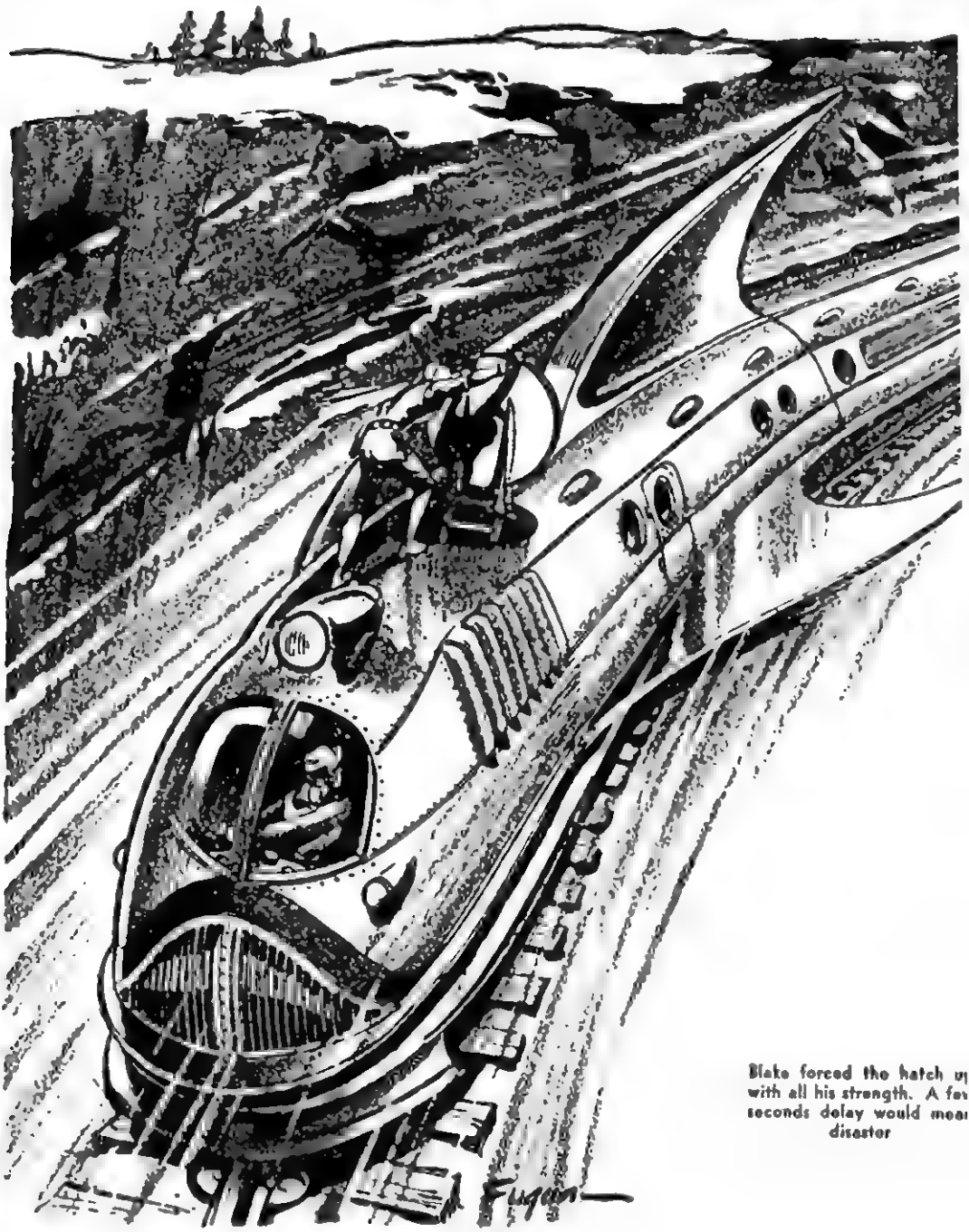
"We'll have all the way back to Mars to argue *that* out," she told him. "And I have an idea you'll lose."

Kenniston had the same idea.

The End.

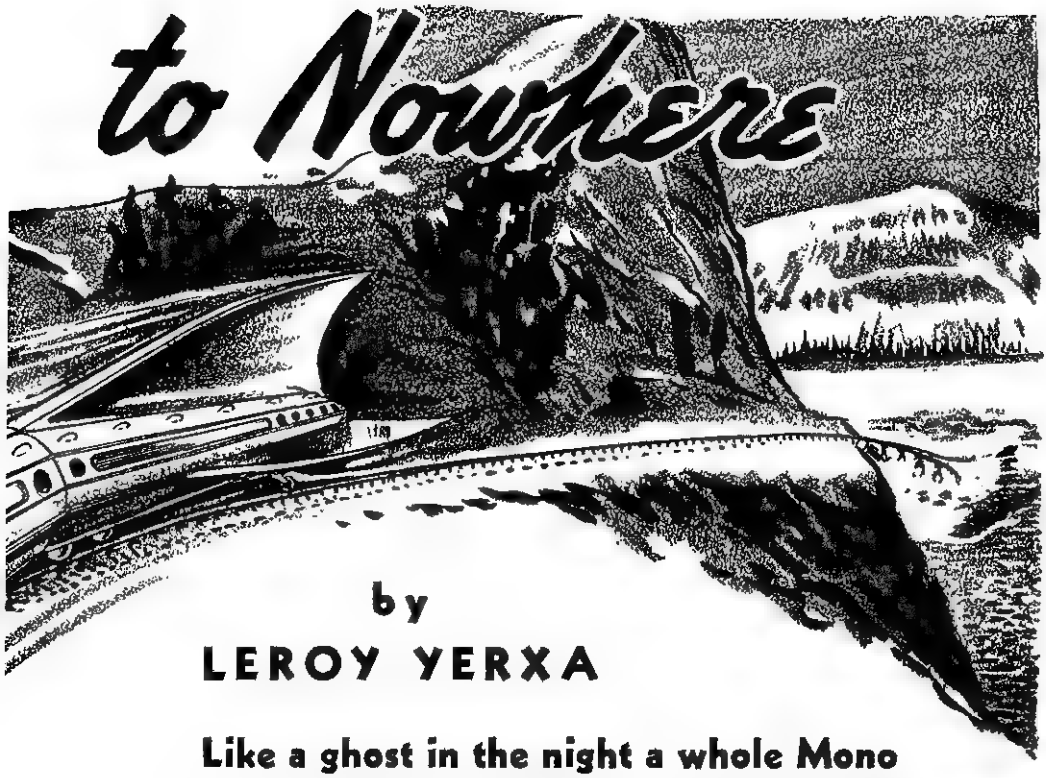
NEXT MONTH: "The Lost Warship" by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

One-Way Ticket



Blake forced the hatch up with all his strength. A few seconds delay would mean disaster

to Nowhere



by

LEROY YERXA

Like a ghost in the night a whole Mono train vanished. And it was up to Jeff Blake to find out where it had gone . . .

"JEFF BLAKE!" Holly O'Toole's knotted hand reached out and grasped the right hand of the passenger descending from the rocket transport. "This is a hell of a night to come home, when a man's been away as long as you have."

Jeff Blake laughed, and swung down to his side to stand on the wind- and rain-swept dock. He towered above O'Toole, lanky and smooth skinned. His face was tanned a deep brown from space travel and little wrinkles curled out from the corners of his mouth. Wrinkles that indicated a willing smile. There was a cheerful warmth of sincerity in his voice.

"Weather doesn't seem to bother me much any more. I've been in and out of a lot of it. This rain isn't much compared to those space turn-overs we've had around moon the last few weeks."

They walked together toward the lighted office. Once inside, Holly O'Toole tossed his coat across the warm elector-rad heater and turned admiring eyes on Jeff Blake's tall frame.

"They sure made a man of you in space service," he said. "The last time you left Hope you were a half-baked kid with a yen for a ray gun."

O'Toole sat back comfortably as Blake removed his jacket and threw it over the heater. Blake was hard, and yet as Holly watched him, there seemed to be a touch of softness in his eyes that hadn't been there when Blake was

a kid. A little more of Wade Blake, maybe. When two men were born identical twins, they were bound together in a lot of odd little ways.

The faintest suggestion of a bitter smile started across Jeff Blake's young face. Then he relaxed, sat down. Lighting a cigarette he sucked deeply and let the smoke drift from his lips.

"The last time I saw you, O'Toole, you were a little red-headed Irishman who stirred up more trouble than my brother and I could get out of in a month. What is it now?"

Holly O'Toole's dark face grew concerned. At once Blake knew his trip would be interesting. Knew that the trouble he had been expecting was close at hand.

"It's your brother, Wade," O'Toole went on. "Wade's in hot water again, and he's in over his head."

That same sardonic smile flitted across Blake's face, and faded immediately. O'Toole was under a terrific strain. The man was only forty-five, yet the once brilliant battle flag of red hair had grown thin in spots. His eyes, once clear and snapping, were a washed-out blue.

"Go on," Blake said kindly. "When I got your message it wasn't easy to drop everything and come. I expected something like this."

O'Toole stared at him, hating to say what he knew he had to.

"Wade is planning to marry Dauna Ferrell."

"Dauna?" Blake was plainly puzzled. "Why, Dauna was a tow-headed brat when I left Earth. But if Wade wants her, why not?"

O'Toole shook his head a little impatiently.

"It isn't that he wants her," he said. "I can't explain everything now. Let's just say that Wade is giving up every chance he'll ever have of owning the 'Hope to Horn' line. He's stirring up trouble between Dauna and her father and making a dangerous ass of himself in the bargain."

BLAKE flicked the long ash from his cigarette.

"He must be a busy man," he admitted. "But where do I fit into this puzzle?"

Holly O'Toole was plainly bewildered.

"I wish I knew," he admitted. "I can't handle every angle alone, and if some changes don't come in a hurry, Wade, Dauna and Walter Ferrell will lose everything they have, including their sanity. You're the only man who can pound any brains into Wade's head. I figured you might be willing to try it, before it's too late."

He stood up rather stiffly, drew his belt up over his rounded paunch. Blake watched him with narrowed, speculative eyes. O'Toole looked at his watch.

"Where is Wade now?" Blake asked.

"At South Station since last night," O'Toole said.

"Does he know I'm on Earth?"

O'Toole looked doubtful.

"I'm afraid he does," he admitted. "I sent your radio-wave last week and he was in the office at the time. I can't explain why, but I have the feeling he checked up after I left and found out who I had radioed."

Blake followed O'Toole to the door, drew on his heavy coat.

"Let's get it over with," he shrugged his shoulders. "I've had to take Wade in hand a couple of times. Once more won't do any harm. We'll go to South Station."

O'Toole hesitated. He had something else to get off his chest.

"Jeff," he spoke gravely. "It's only fair to tell you that being Wade's twin

may get you into some pretty heavy trouble."

Jeff grinned queerly.

"Good!" he said. "I sort of like the stuff."

The door slammed behind them and the light from the single window faded against the dark field.

A SWIFT shadow of a man darted from between the empty space docks. The stranger's arm went high and jerked straight. A wicked knife flicked from the steeled fingers. It missed Blake's neck by inches; struck the heavy door behind him. Blake took two swift steps forward, realized the man was already lost in the night. He stopped and pivoted. O'Toole had already jerked the knife from the door, was staring at it with tight lips.

"Playful bunch of goons you've got around here," Blake said mirthlessly.

"I'm afraid that's some of the trouble I mentioned," O'Toole replied. "I told you Wade is stirring up a pack of trouble and I'm afraid you're dropping right into the middle of it."

He held the knife out toward Blake and the younger man took it.

"My brother must have changed a lot since I saw him last. Ten years ago he spent most of his time playing the violin and raising flowers."

"Still does," O'Toole answered in a far-off voice. "But he has a few other hobbies now. Games that he's learned to play too well for his own good."

Blake was studying the knife that had missed his head. He ran a thumb lightly over the razor edge of the weapon.

"Games that you play with knives?"

O'Toole nodded.

"Unless I'm greatly mistaken," he answered grimly. "That nice little fellow who tossed the bread knife at you is one of Grudge Harror's play boys."

"Now," Blake said, "we're getting some place. Who is Grudge Harror and what's he got against Wade?"

"I'll try to tell you what I know of Harror while we're on our way to make that next mono-train," O'Toole said. He took another quick glance at his watch. "She pulls out in half an hour, so keep away from lights and let's get to the station before we miss her."

THEY went out of the fenced space-field, bending double against the storm. For several minutes O'Toole led Jeff Blake through deserted streets. Reaching the lighted dome that was the Hope Mono-Terminal, he explained.

"Grudge Harror," he said, "is the leader of a gang of cut-throats who have been holding up and wrecking trains from here to the border. He's got Walter Ferrell on the verge of bankruptcy. If something doesn't happen soon to stop him, the Hope to Horn *

*"Hope to Horn" was the nickname lovingly applied by its loyal employees to the mono railroad developed and owned by Walter Ferrell. These mono, or single-tracked trains were brought into service in 2100. The Hope to Horn line itself consisted of a north- and south-bound rail of heavy plastic extending from Hope, Alaska to Cape Horn, South America.

They were powered by standard sixteen engine deisels, capable of five hundred miles per hour. Built almost in the shape of long graceful fish, the trains were of highly colored plastic. They ran on a single rail of plastic-steel.

In a few short hours men and women tired of business could follow the entire Pacific coast line from one end to the other, the entire trip consuming twenty-two running hours between Hope and Cape Horn.

The plastic rail kept upkeep at a minimum and allowed the use of a simplified signal system in place of earlier complicated switches and signal signs. The track was divided into five-hundred-mile sections. Every two hours a train left one of these sections, or "blocks." In leaving, they allowed the plastic to turn green or "open," signaling the next train to depart. As long as the pilot could see green track ahead and red behind, he was safe to travel "on time."

Gyroscopic balancers, huge head and tail fins, and constantly maintained speeds allowed a mono to travel safely on a single row of centered wheels.—Ed.

line will fold up like a busted space-kite."

"And Wade?" Blake questioned. "Where does he fit in the picture?"

"Ferrell depended on Wade to track Harror down and tear his gang apart. You mentioned that Wade liked to raise flowers. Well! Thus far, he's still at it. So for six months Harror has torn the business apart, train by train."

Blake looked through the great entrance into the warmly lighted Mono-Terminal. It was nearly deserted.

"It's a rotten shame that a cheap bunch of punks have spoiled a business as fine as Walter Ferrell's mono line," he said slowly. "It looks as though he has picked the wrong man for the job of getting Grudge Harror. Maybe we can do something about it."

Holly O'Toole whacked him heartily across the back.

"I knew you'd say that, Jeff." Something of the old fight was coming back into the Irishman's eyes. "I'll admit I'm stumped, but maybe with your help . . ."

THE mammoth dome of Hope's mono terminal was glowing warmly under a rainbow of fluorescent light, when Blake and O'Toole entered the rotunda. Crowds jostled toward the open gates that led to the V-Gaps that held the single-tracked mono train upright when they were at the station docks.

They followed down the long ramp to the dock and waited. A mono train scraped slowly around the V-Gap and stopped. On its blunt, plastic nose a single numeral was printed—6. The train was decorated in a sleek contrast of silver and brown. Inside, porters rushed about making the train ready for its return trip south.

Once on board, Blake stretched out and relaxed into deep air cushions.

"It's a good feeling to have some luxury again," he admitted. He lighted a cigarette from his crushed package and O'Toole accepted another. They watched quietly as a few despondent looking passengers filed in and sat down. A tense undercurrent of feeling was at once evident to Blake's keen eye. These travelers were here because of necessity. Not for their own pleasure.

He was totally unprepared for what happened in the next ten minutes. A girl came in. Before Blake could register surprise, she had uttered a little cry of joy, plunked her smart little body down at his side and thrown her arms around his neck.

"Oh! Darling! This *is* a surprise." He felt rich, warm lips press tightly to his own, brown eyes staring lovingly into his.

Suddenly the eyes widened in surprised horror and she stiffened. Her fingers went limp against his neck. Her lips tightened. She jumped up and sank limply into the chair opposite him.

"Oh!" She blushed profusely. "Oh! Heavens, I thought . . ."

Blake's face burned. Blood rushed to his cheeks and emotions he hadn't felt for years came rushing back into his body.

"I—I didn't expect . . ." he started.

The girl had collected her wits.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she said. "You look so much like someone I know . . ."

Blake looked her over quickly, and decided she was the most attractive, clean cut young thing he had ever seen. She was dressed in sleek brown traveling clothes. A pert, tight-fitting hat allowed the wealth of shining brown hair to escape its edges and flow down the straight, smoothly-molded shoulders. Her lips were still slightly curved

in that attractive oval of dismay.

"Do you always kiss strange men who look like people you know," he asked, and immediately realized he was being cruel. "Forgive me, it *was* unexpected."

A look of recognition flooded her face.

"You must be Jeff Blake!" She stood up and clasped his hand warmly. "If it weren't for that coat of space tan, I'd have sworn you were Wade."

"Dauna Ferrell," he said with a gasp. "Golly, but you've grown up since I saw you last."

Her face turned a lovely pink.

"You won't have a very nice opinion of me after what I did?"

"Forget it." He leaned forward. "I've heard you're in love with Wade. If I was fortunate enough for only that one kiss, to take Wade's place with so beautiful a young lady, my life is one kiss richer than I deserve."

"I *do* love Wade," she said. "But if his brother insists on throwing such compliments at me, I'm sure he's going to be fine for my spirit. Thank you, sir."

HER eyes traveled suddenly beyond him, toward the car entrance. Blake turned and his face lighted at the sight of the tall, elderly man coming toward them. Walter Ferrell had aged since he last saw him, but the snow-white head, slim waist and wiry legs were the same. Ferrell came forward, a look of cold hostility in his eyes. Then he recognized the easy figure slouched in the chair opposite his daughter. A keen smile lighted his features.

"Jeff Blake!" His hand shot out. "My God, boy, you're good to look at."

Blake was on his feet, one hand in Ferrell's, the other on the older man's shoulder.

"And you!" he said. "The man who went to riches while I was kicking around as a space tramp in every port of the universe."

Dauna moved gracefully, swiftly to her father's side.

"Tell Dad how I greeted you," she blushed prettily. "Dad, I think Jeff had better go back to the moon. He and Wade will be quarreling over me if I go on acting the same way I started out today."

Ferrell paid no attention to Dauna's outburst. Yet, the mention of Wade's name sent smouldering fires into his eyes. He changed the subject abruptly. Drawing Blake down to the chair beside him he said.

"Tell me boy, what's happened since you left? I want to hear the whole story."

Blake talked. As he related the story of his past ten years away from earth, he watched O'Toole and Dauna, seated together a few seats away. They were discussing Wade, he knew. Although he talked with Walter Ferrell, Blake's thoughts were with O'Toole, Wade and the girl, Dauna.

"Walter," he asked suddenly. "What's wrong with Wade? Has he been in trouble?"

Ferrell tipped a tired head back against the cushion of his chair.

"Nothing," he said slowly. "At least, nothing I can put my finger on."

"Then," Blake insisted, "from what O'Toole says, you've both been pretty tough on him. That is, if you're telling me the truth."

"Damn it, Blake," Ferrell exploded. "When I say nothing, I mean we haven't caught him violating any laws. It's—well, I just never had any admiration for Wade. He's what the younger generation would call a cream puff. Soft, flabby and a mind that refuses to grasp any problem fitted to a man of his age."

Blake stared out the window, waiting. The mono had pulled out of Hope. Outside nothing was visible in the night except an occasional jagged peak outlined against a cloudy sky. Troubled by Ferrell's continued silence, he turned again to his friend.

"YOU haven't told me much," he protested. "O'Toole called me home because he thought important things were going to take place. He thinks I ought to knock Wade around a little, but I've got to know why."

Ferrell swore softly.

"O'Toole is always sticking his neck out where it gets clipped every now and then. He's a swell Irishman, but his mountains are actually mole hills."

Blake nodded and said covertly, "Someone tried to heave a knife into me at the space-port. Was that one of O'Toole's mole hills?"

Ferrell's body jerked upright, and the muscles in his face stood out tautly.

"The hell you say!"

"Truth—ask O'Toole."

Blake's voice died. His eyes turned to slits. The coach door had opened quickly and a man had stepped inside. He was dressed from head to foot in skin-tight black leather. His eyes were covered with a flashing, silvery mask. Blake's gaze was on the small, ugly electro-gun in the bandit's hand.

"A visitor," Blake said laconically. At the same time he pushed his feet far back under the chair and braced them, like bent springs.

The masked man crouched at the waist and the gun whipped around, covering the few passengers in the car.

"Stand up—all of you." He spoke harshly and with deadly precision. "On your feet, and make it fast."

Blake waited. A low monotone of voices protested, died out to a whisper of fear, and the passengers, including Ferrell stood with arms raised.

The electro gun came around slowly toward Blake.

"Up on your corns," the bandit spat at him. His eyes were black, diamond slits in the silver mask.

Blake's gaze never wavered. Silver Mask came toward him slowly.

"You heard me."

A scorching flame seared Blake's cheek as the electro gun exploded and part of its force burned his skin. Blake's face whitened with rage and he dove desperately forward. Smashing a hard fist into Silver Mask's face, he watched the fellow's body go limp. Two swift reflex actions, one savage and murderously threatening, the other desperately defensive, had brought lightning developments.

Blake heard Dauna scream in terror and turned like a flash. But the heavy butt of a new electro gun swept down on his head. There was a sudden sickening jolt and bright flashes of light went tearing into his brain. He pitched forward across the first bandit's limp body, and the car, spinning before his eyes, went blank.

WHEN Blake came around, he was stretched out full length on the floor, a pillow under his head. He looked up into Dauna's eyes.

"If you're wondering about the silver masked man who struck you," she said, "There are dozens of them on the train. They have us all under guard."

He sat up a little weakly, felt his head clear. Ferrell and O'Toole sat across from his make shift bed.

"They won't let me make a dash for the door, Jeff," O'Toole said in an unhappy voice. "Once in the hall, I could clean up on a snag of those black devils."

"And get your head bashed in, like

Jeff did," Ferrel added. "You're sitting right here with me, *Mr.* O'Toole until we find out what this is all about."

Ferrell turned to Blake.

"You asked for trouble, Jeff," he said tersely. "You've got it. These are the same Silver Masks that have practically ruined my business. Looks as though this might do it. Wade was told to clean out this tribe of black devils six months ago. I detailed fifty men to work with him. I'll bet you a ten spot that at this moment Wade Blake is at South Station watering his flower bed, or some equally insane occupation."

Dauna was on her feet, arms akimbo, cheeks blazing.

"That's not fair, Dad," she flared. "He just isn't the type of boy to handle this problem. You saw what happened to Jeff . . ."

"Wait a minute," Blake begged. "O'Toole is all for knocking Wade's head against his garden wall. Ferrell, you want him to keep us out of trouble when he's eight thousand miles away, and Dauna is protecting him when I'm not altogether sure he deserves it. For the time being let's worry about what is to become of us. Later, there'll be time to fight over Wade."

Ferrell looked abashed.

"You're right," he admitted more quietly. "But you're a better man than I am if you can make sense out of this. Why don't they take what they want, kill us and be on their way?"

Blake looked out of the window. The sky was clear now. The rain had stopped and the moon and stars were visible.

"I think I can answer that," he said. "From my following the stars, we are now heading directly east, into the heart of the mountain country. If I'm correct on directions, the monoline runs directly north and south. Right?"

O'Toole pushed past him and strained his face to the glass. He turned, face shining.

"By golly," he said. "Jeff's right. We must be flying or something. There isn't any track that's laid in this direction!"

FERRELL stood at O'Toole's shoulder, looking out into the blackness. He turned toward them, face stark with terror.

"It—can't—be!" he spoke slowly. "Vancouver is south of us, and yet . . ."

"And yet you're going east." The strange voice cut in on them harshly.

Blake wheeled about to face the third Silver Mask he had seen tonight. The man towered above them, a full seven feet tall. His thick lips, visible below the mask, were curved in a cruel, delighted smile.

"You've bought one way tickets," he said gruffly. "Tickets that will take you—nowhere."

Continuing, he turned to Ferrell.

"Walter Ferrell, and his daughter, Dauna Ferrell. Am I right? We are fortunate in picking our company tonight."

"As owner of this rail line," Farrell demanded in an even voice. "I want to know what this is all about. Where are we going?"

Outside the sounds of the wheels had faded. The train wasn't moving. It seemed to tip at a slight angle, as though leaning on some support.

"My name is Harror," Silver Mask said. "You're not going anywhere for the time being, and while you are here I'll thank you to call me *Mr.* Harror. Don't try to leave this car. My men are stationed all around the train with orders to shoot and look afterward. Take a look outside in a few minutes. You may be surprised."

He turned and stooped to go through the door.

Blake turned to Ferrell and O'Toole.

"I haven't got the drift of all this yet," he admitted. "But we're in for trouble and plenty of it."

BLAKE was sitting quietly in the smoker, head reclining on the window ledge, eyes half closed in a cloud of smoke. The girl and her father were asleep. O'Toole pretended to be, but Blake wasn't sure of the Irishman. O'Toole slept with one eye open most of the time.

The deep silence and blackness outside of the window could indicate only one thing. They were in some sort of a cave. The giant Harror had said if they looked out, they might be surprised. Yet, hours had passed, and the place was quiet and black as a tomb.

The door opened and a newspaper flopped on the floor. Blake went forward and picked it up.

"Thought you'd like to see the big news." It was Harror's heavy voice rumbling from the doorway. "Flown in from South Station. We've been waiting to see what reaction the kidnaping of a train might have."

Blake listened quietly, and without a word turned on his heel and returned to his chair. The door closed on them again.

Blake glanced at the headline. Then the full significance of Silver Mask's latest move hit him between the eyes. The headline of the South Station Star was in letters six inches high:

MONO FLYER MISSING
Entire Train Lost
Without Trace

Mono 6, crack flyer of the "Hope to Horn" mono line disappeared from the face of the earth tonight. On board were Walter Ferrell, the company's owner, and Dauna, his daughter. At an emergency meeting of the board of directors, it was admitted that not the slightest clue to the train's whereabouts has been discovered.

Soon after midnight, Mono 6 of the west coast's crack Mono Line left Hope, Alaska. No further reports came after it passed the first five-hundred-mile zone. Reports of a wreck are unconfirmed. A complete search of the track failed to bring to light the slightest hint of the flyer's final resting place.

In the past few hours the company has faced the problem of handling thousands of tour cancellations. Officials of the line are attempting vainly to allay the fears of both would-be passengers and stockholders. Wade Blake, Vice President of the company had previously ordered an investigation in an attempt to track to earth the series of strange accidents that have followed the Hope to Horn mono line for some months, but cannot be located at present for a statement.

Blake threw the paper on the floor. There was more to the story. Much more. Here in a few columns he had read the final exit of a great railroad line and its owner. Unless Walter Ferrell and Mono 6 could arrive at South Station, unharmed and within a few hours, the world would refuse to accept further service from the Hope to Horn and Ferrell's business would be ruined.

The article said that Wade could not be located. Blake hoped that he had been close when the train failed to arrive at Vancouver. A momentary frown turned down the corners of his lips. Perhaps Wade wasn't as helpless as they seemed to think. Blake fervently hoped so.

SINCE Blake had finished reading the paper, two hours had passed, as nearly as he could guess. O'Toole came in from the car's smoking compartment, and sat down wearily across from Blake. He pushed his big feet up on the chair beside Blake.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

Blake pointed to the paper silently and O'Toole picked it up. He read quickly, his eyes darting from side to

side of the page. His face grew purple.

"They certainly pulled a fast one," he growled. "A whole train missing, with the owner of the line and his daughter on it. I never stopped to think what that might mean when the papers got hold of it."

"Nor I," Blake admitted. "But Harror did, and if I'm not mistaken, someone with a lot more brains than Harror had the same idea. This thing was carefully planned, O'Toole, but there are two points that the Silver Masks overlooked."

O'Toole looked at him questioningly.

"One was they didn't expect you and me to cause the trouble we're going to," Blake went on, "and the other is Wade. He's around somewhere. He may help us out at the right time."

O'Toole spat disgustedly.

"*We* can cause trouble if we ever get out of here," he admitted. "I'm not so sure of Wade."

A shaft of light cut in through the window suddenly, blinding them both.

They stared out with wide eyes. A murmer of voices from the car told them that the others were awake, and also impressed by what they saw.

Mono 6 was in a great cavern. Great black granite walls towered high above. The mono train had evidently entered the cave slowly and slipped between a long row of huge boulders that held it upright. The cave was a graveyard of mono cars. They lay across the full width of its floor, dismantled and torn apart for whatever value they had to offer.

For the first time Blake realized just how large operations had been; just how close the Silver Masks were to ruining the industry Ferrell had painstakingly built up.

Men appeared from a long row of doors worked into the cliff side. They all looked alike in the black suits and glittering silver masks. Tools of every description had made their appearance. Beyond the doors from whence they had come must be a complete set of living quarters with access to the outside world.

Common sense told Blake that the entrance through which Mono 6 had arrived was now carefully sealed. If he was to solve the mystery of Grudge Harror's plans and make escape possible, it would be necessary to go through those doors. Harror himself was there somewhere, and Blake's fists ached to meet the man alone.

"MY GOLLY," O'Toole breathed. "They all look alike. What you suppose they'll do with us? Must be forty or fifty people on this set of cars." Blake turned away from the window.

"If the train were wrecked," he said in a matter of fact voice, "they'd take everything off it and leave it here. With passengers on board, they have to remove the baggage and movable parts. After that . . ."

"After that, we'll all go to hell the fastest way," O'Toole said with grim lips. "Let's get something started. I can't sit still until they decide what to do with us."

"If I'm not mistaken," Blake said grimly, "they have us all disposed of well in advance. You mentioned just one thing that may help us out."

"If I did," O'Toole admitted, "It was just crazy luck."

"They all look alike." Blake stood up, studied O'Toole carefully, and said. "We're going to join the gang of the Silver Masks."

O'Toole grinned.

"Just like that," he said dryly. "And this guy Harror is going to shake our hands and say, 'Glad to see you're with us, boys.'"

Blake was already out of the smoking

lounge. He went toward the end of the car with a swift, determined stride. Farrell and Dauna had been at the window and as he approached the door leading outside, they turned.

"Hold it, Jeff," Farrell said. "You're going to do something foolish and I won't have it."

"We've already got ourselves into a pretty foolish mess," Blake reminded him almost bitterly. "If I can do any good by trying, I don't want you to interfere. It may be too late."

Dauna barred his way to the door. Her face was drawn and bloodless.

"You're going to face that giant, Harror," she pleaded haltingly. "Jeff, please . . . ?"

He took her hands in his, and smiled down at her.

"Wade wouldn't want you to put on a scene," he said gently. "I'm in this thing up to my neck. Wade's name and my own are both involved."

She hesitated and stepped away from him. Her arms dropped hopelessly.

O'Toole reached the door with Blake.

"What are the plans," he asked? "I'm in on them remember."

"Then start howling at the top of your lungs," Blake grinned. "Call Harror every name you ever heard of, but remember there are women in the car. We're going to get dragged out of here and have a talk with that freak."

O'Toole nodded.

"Okay!" he said. "I get the idea. If we can be bad boys, maybe Harror will spank us himself."

"He'll try," Blake answered quietly. "From then on it will depend on us who does the punishing."

BLAKE turned to the door and ignoring Dauna, started to pound on it with all his strength, O'Toole added his weight to Blake's and they started to shout loudly.

"We want to sock that big goon, Harror," O'Toole howled. He turned and winked at Dauna. "How'm I doing?" he asked.

Dauna smiled gamely.

"So well, you'll probably be shot at once," she said. "Please Blake, be careful."

They pounded again, harder than ever. The door started to sway and buckle under their weight. There was a heavy step outside, and a murmur of angry voices.

"Shut up in there."

"We want to talk with your boss," Blake shouted. "Let us out or we'll clean up on the whole gang of you."

The door swung open, and a guard came in. Two more were close behind. Guns swung around, covering the car.

"You'll talk with Harror," the first man said. "And you'll be damned sorry you did."

He pushed a gun into Blake's side.

"Now walk," he ordered. "And walk straight. No monkey business."

O'Toole started to follow them.

"You're staying here," the guard growled. "This monkey is going to get the business."

O'Toole reddened with rage.

"Why you masked ape," he said. "Let me out of here or I'll push your chin into your scalp."

That did the trick. The second guard twisted around and punched O'Toole in the face. The Irishman reeled, caught himself and said through bloody lips, "You'll pay for that."

The masked man pushed him from the car and O'Toole went a little uncertainly down the steps and after Blake.

They crossed the floor of the cave toward the series of doors in the wall. Two more guards joined the group and

they paused before the first door.

"We got some wise guys," the man who was covering Blake shouted. "Want to give them a going over, Chief?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Grudge Harror's heavy voice said from beyond the door.

"Bring them in."

Blake kicked the door open and strode into a small, mercury-lighted room. There was a single chair and the desk behind which Harror was seated. His huge arms rested across its top. His expression darkened as he saw Blake.

"What's he been up to?"

The guard stepped close to Harror and pocketed his weapon.

"He was shouting his head off," he said. Then, in an almost apologetic voice he added, "The Irishman insisted on coming along."

BLAKE'S eyes were on Harror's face. The giant's fists were clenched, his lips tight and cruel. He was searching for something.

"All right," Harror growled finally. "What's the game?"

"Nothing," Blake answered shrewdly. "We were waiting for you to murder us, and got impatient, that's all."

Two of the guards left and Harror swung to his feet. He was leering.

Blake watched the remaining guards from the corner of his eye. O'Toole was still standing quietly by the door, alert and ready. He saw Blake's eye on his, and winked deliberately. O'Toole, Blake decided, was ready any time.

"You were right on the murder angle," Harror admitted. "Pretty smart, ain't you?"

"About some things," Blake admitted. "I don't fall for everything I read in the papers. I know you used a hidden mono track to get us here, and that you'll probably send us back over it into a nice deep canyon, when you have everything you want off the train."

Harror leaned over silently and spat into his face. Blake saw red. With a lightning thrust he smashed the lamp from the table and plunged the room into blackness. From O'Toole's side of the room a ray gun belched fire, but Blake was already out of range. He heard a cry of pain and realized that Harror had caught the flame on the arm. Harror, outlined in the light of the ray was almost on top of him.

From the spot where O'Toole had been, Blake heard a sullen thud and a long groan of pain. Dodging from Harror's plunging fall, Blake knew O'Toole was doing his part. He grasped the edge of the table and tried to thrust it in front of Harror. The man swore loudly and kicked it away. There was a slit of light coming from under the door.

In its path, Blake saw Harror standing above him, a hairy fist descending like a ton of lead. He twisted his face around, sensed Harror's blow miss him by a fraction of an inch. Diving low he hit Harror a body blow with his shoulder and the giant doubled in pain. Blake swung upward before Harror could regain his balance, and set his fist crashing into Harror's face. The giant swung backward like an enraged elephant. Two more flashes of electro-fire went spurting over his head and O'Toole started to sing in a loud, off-key voice.

"Slug 'em," O'Toole chanted. "It's the Irish that are in this mess tonight."

In the darkness, Blake grinned painfully. His lip was split and bleeding. His arm ached from the forceful contact with Harror's jaw.

Another guard went down in the scuffle and O'Toole howled his battle cry again.

HARROR was silent. Blake changed his position wearily, waiting for some sign. He heard Harror breathing loudly from the far corner. The blow on the face must have dazed him.

Blake closed it slowly, listening to Harror. Waiting for him to strike again. Then two giant arms closed tightly around his chest, cutting off his breath. He tried to shout, but his lips made no sound. He felt himself sinking toward the floor, Harror on top of him. Harror was holding on with all his strength.

Blake relaxed slowly, and his head fell to one side. He felt the grip relax just a trifle, and gathered all his remaining strength. With a terrific uppercut, Blake's arm shot upward, catching Harror squarely on the chin. There was a sudden snap as the giant's head tipped back as though unhinged. His arms relaxed and Blake fell away from him.

The Irishman had done his job well. The room was quiet.

Then: "Jeff, Jeff, are you all right."

Blake chuckled.

"I've got condensed ribs," he said. "But I think Harror will lie still for a while."

"Golly!" O'Toole sighed in relief. "You sure had a Goliath on your hands. Wish I could have helped you."

"What became of those two guards," Jeff asked? "Seems to me they had you on the spot for a while."

"Aw!" O'Toole said. "I got hold of one of them fire guns and there wasn't anything to it."

Blake had reached the door to the outer cavern. He opened it a couple of inches and looked out. The Silver Mask gang were still working on Mono 6.

Even as he watched, a man detached himself from the gang at the far end of the train and came slowly toward the partially opened door. Blake jumped back and closed it tightly.

"Get two of these guards out of their uniforms," he said. "Make it quick. We've got more trouble coming."

A QUICK knock came on the door. Blake said, in a hard voice.

"Yeah! Who is it?"

"Slater," was the reply. "Tell the boss we got the train cleaned out. We're all ready to set it loose."

In the light of the open door, Blake looked at O'Toole. The Irishman was already in one of the Silver Mask uniforms. His face was hidden and he looked like one of the gang.

"Tell him the boss will be all set in a minute," Blake said. "I've got to get into one of these outfits."

O'Toole flung the door open wider and pushed the bodies of the silent guards out of sight.

"We'll be out in a minute," he said to Slater. "Get her ready to roll."

"Yes sir," Slater answered him respectfully. "The cab is all fixed, and the motors are turning. The hidden door has been opened so we better make it snappy."

O'Toole nodded.

"Okay," he said. "Make sure you don't leave anything on board that's useful. And Slater . . ."

The man had turned. Now he hesitated and turned back.

"Yeah?"

"Harror is staying here," O'Toole said quickly. "He ain't feeling so good. Says I'm to give the orders."

Slater laughed.

"That's a good one," he chuckled. "How long since that gorilla started giving orders around here."

Still laughing, he turned and went back toward the waiting masked men.

O'Toole closed the door and ripped the mask away.

"This is it," he said quickly. "I knew Wade was mixed up in this business. Harror isn't the real boss here."

Blake was half way into a uniform of the Silver Masks. He finished his job before answering. Then he spoke.

"I know you and Ferrell hate Wade's guts," he said slowly, "but . . ."

"It's not me so much," O'Toole protested. "Ferrell said long ago that Wade was in this mess. He didn't seem to get any action on the case. Now with the guy Slater saying Harror isn't the boss, there isn't any other answer."

"SORRY, O'Toole," Blake said. "I should be willing to admit that Wade's our man. I don't know why I can't. It's just that blood is pretty thick stuff, I guess. It's hard to think your own brother would turn on you like this."

O'Toole lowered his head.

"We've got to do something," he said quietly. "Those guys won't sit out there waiting forever."

Blake stood up slowly.

"Supposing Wade isn't the chief," he asked. "What then?"

"They'll kill us all, just as they already plan to," O'Toole groaned. "We might as well take a flying chance."

Blake shook his head.

"I've got a better idea," he said.

"Then spill it. We haven't much time."

"To begin with," Blake said. "If Wade was in this he'd have shown up here long ago. The paper said he couldn't be located. I'd recognize my twin even in one of these outfits."

O'Toole protested.

"Then who is the chief?" He's here somewhere and Slater sure didn't intend to take orders from Harror."

"He must be on the train," Blake answered.

"Now you're crazy," O'Toole answered savagely. "The people on Mono 6 have been locked up for hours. If the leader of the Silver Masks was among them he'd have taken charge hours ago."

"Unless," Blake said thoughtfully, "he didn't want any of us to *know* he was the leader."

O'Toole pulled the mask down over his eyes.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "You've got something up your sleeve and I'll play the cards the way you want them."

"One more thing," Blake told him. "These men had to have a track to get Mono 6 into this cave. When it goes out again we'll be on the same track, but it will end in a canyon or deep lake."

"Go on."

"Well! We've got to get started on that trip. After we are out you and I will have to take our chances of stopping the mono."

"And I thought Grudge Harror was a tough baby," O'Toole grinned.

"IT isn't a matter of being tough," Blake said. "Can you handle the engine room alone?"

"Handled it for years," O'Toole said coolly. "But I'd like to know where that track ends."

"You will." Blake went toward the door. He gripped O'Toole's shoulder. "You're a good Irishman, O'Toole. Now go out of here and straight to the cab. I don't think they'll dare send one of the other men. If the controls are tied into place, leave them alone. When I signal, set all motors going full speed. Sit tight and keep her flying."

"And the end of the track?" O'Toole asked. "If I don't get shot in the back before I'm half way across the cave, how do I know when to stop?"

Blake chuckled dryly.

"Perhaps you won't," he admitted. "But I'll be in the rear lounge with every male passenger within my sight. One of them is bound to break down when he knows he's at the end of the trail."

"So?"

"I'll jerk the emergency cord," Blake said. "Set your brakes the minute you hear it. O'Toole, it's a long chance but we've got to take it."

"One more thing," O'Toole asked. "Blake, who in hell is the leader of the Silver Masks?"

Blake hesitated, his face darkening. He opened the door and pushed O'Toole out gently.

"If I'm not mistaken," he whispered evenly, "Walter Ferrell knows more about this than he's telling."

THE gang of Silver Masks were gathered around the front end of Mono 6 as Holly O'Toole and Jeff Blake emerged from Harror's office. They walked swiftly toward the cab, and Slater who had evidently been waiting, stepped from the crowd and came toward them.

"How about it?" He addressed Holly O'Toole, as O'Toole seemed to be leading Blake. "Everything has been stripped from the baggage cars. She's ready for her trip into the lake."

"Okay!" O'Toole mumbled. He turned to Blake. "Take two men and get all the passengers into the lounge car."

Blake's heart was pounding wildly. If O'Toole slipped now, they'd all pay for it. He turned toward the crowd of waiting masked men.

"Two of you guys step out," he ordered. "Open the doors and herd those cattle into the last car back."

They obeyed him instantly. In five minutes every man and woman in the flyer were crowded into the car with Walter Ferrell and Dauna. O'Toole hesitated, started to climb into the cab of Mono 6, and Slater stopped him.

Standing a few feet away, Blake heard them mumble something. O'Toole pointed to Blake.

"I'll see that she gets clear of the cave," he said in a loud voice. "The boss wants him to be in the car until it's started and on the way down."

Slater hesitated, nodded and turned away. O'Toole winked and Blake grinned back at him. The Irishman had done a swell job. This was one night when his blarney had been a blessing.

When Jeff Blake went into the lounge car, he drew his electro gun. The car was full of frightened women and angry men. He was afraid they might turn on him in the Silver Mask, and spoil his plans. Slater had followed him to the door.

"Don't stick too long," the man cautioned him. "You'll be doing a hundred miles an hour before you hit the head end of the valley. The boss is going to jump when he leaves the cave."

The boss? Then O'Toole really had done a good job. Automatically Blake looked toward Walter Ferrell, and noticed that he was of the same build and size as O'Toole. Slater couldn't see the occupants of the car, but he guessed who Blake was staring at.

"Take good care of Ferrell," Slater said in a dry whisper. "He's worth a lot of money to us."

Blake grinned.

"Don't worry," he said. *"I'll take good care of him."*

MONO 6 started to glide smoothly back out of the cave. Somewhere out of sight behind the flyer, a huge door opened in the side of the mountain and screeched its way into the

concealed slit above. The train gathered speed swiftly, and the moon suddenly appeared from nowhere. Blake waited, made sure there were no guards remaining on board. Then he ran swiftly toward the group around Ferrell. He ripped the mask off as he moved, and Dauna, her eyes glued to his face, gasped in happy surprise.

"Jeff," she ran toward him, "Oh! Jeff, I'm so glad."

He pressed his lips to hers quickly, turned away without a word and faced Walter Ferrell. Ferrell's face was expressionless, frightened.

"*Jeff Blake,*" he said. "How did you make it?"

"There isn't time to talk now," Blake answered quickly. "O'Toole and I overcame Harror. We managed to get them to start Mono 6 out of the cave. O'Toole is in the cab now. In a few minutes we'll be free. Before they wake up to the trick we played on them we'll be five hundred miles away."

Ferrell's face relaxed. Although Blake watched him closely, the man showed no sign of alarm.

"Good work, boy." His hand gripped Blake's shoulder. "I don't know how you did it, but there'll be a big reward for you when we reach South Station."

Blake sat down opposite him. His eyes never left Ferrell's face. Yet, Ferrell held himself remarkably in reserve.

"I did it more for Dauna than anyone else," Blake admitted slowly. "We wouldn't have anything happen to her would we?"

Ferrell turned toward his daughter.

"I've been pretty hard on my girl," he said. "But if she hadn't got out safely I'd have torn that place apart with my bare hands."

He meant every word of it. Blake's body tensed. The full shock of what Ferrell's words meant was sinking slowly into his brain. Suddenly he shot to his feet.

"I've been a fool," he said. "A damned, blind fool!"

"A fool?" There was no mistaking Walter Ferrell's bewilderment.

Blake was already at the car door.

"I'm going to take a long chance," he shouted back. "Ferrell, you crowd the passengers into both halls at the ends of the car. Open the outer doors. If the train goes into the lake, try to get as many out as you can."

WITH the shouts of alarm still ringing in his ears, Blake went swiftly through the long empty cars toward the cab. The train was backing through the night now at a terrific speed, and the black forest flashed past him as he went to his appointment with Holly O'Toole.

Blake reached the head car, tried the door and stepped back in alarm. It was locked. He looked overhead and found the tiny emergency entrance to the catwalk above. Back inside, he dragged several chairs out quickly, climbed them and pushed upward. Luckily the door was open. Head and shoulders above the train, he stopped. The wind pushed him back, clutching at his breath. He climbed out on the catwalk slowly, crouching to the smoothness of the plastic, and wriggled ahead.

The diesel room was below him now. Its top door opened easy. He listened. All motors were purring smoothly. The hot smell of oil drifted up. Ahead, the cab was silent.

He pushed his feet down cautiously and dropped. His feet hit the oily floor and he fell flat. The door to the cab was open. He went toward it, saw lights over the dash and ran to the main control stick. It was lashed firmly in place with heavy chain.

The speed indicater was pointing to four hundred miles per hour. Swiftly he released the chain, and felt the control lever break loose, falling into neutral. Blake reached for the magnetic brake, and heard a footstep on the floor behind. He whirled swiftly. O'Toole was standing at the entrance of the deisel room, electro gun pointing at Blake's chest.

"You're a smart one," O'Toole said. He waved the gun meaningly. "I'm glad you cut the power. We'll coast from here to the lake."

Blake was silent.

"Thought Walter Ferrell was the chief of this outfit, did you?" O'Toole was enjoying himself. "Well, I didn't have any idea of jumping the train. We'll coast within a mile of the cut, shoot the coupling free between the cab and the coaches, and set our brakes. Walter Ferrell and his little party are going to taste cold water for the last time."

Blake said nothing. He started to walk deliberately toward the hulking Irishman. O'Toole snarled.

"Back," he warned. "I've got to kill you anyhow. It might as well be now." Blake grinned.

"I can't understand why you ever included me in this set-up to begin with," he said. "Things would have been easier if you hadn't sent for me."

"Listen Blake, when I sent for you, I figured you'd fit in here. I didn't know you'd fall for all this kid brother heroic stuff."

"YOU evidently knew something of my history," Blake said coolly. "Why did you play that sympathetic game?"

O'Toole seemed anxious to be understood.

"I knew you had been pirating every space craft between here and Mars," he said. "I knew that you had a swell reputation and were clever as hell. I knew that if you'd see things my way, I could get Walter Ferrell in bankruptcy within a month, and cut you in as a partner."

"Why change your mind?" Blake asked. He sat down in the pilot's chair and crossed his legs comfortably. "All we have to do is cut that coupling loose, ride back to the cave and collect all the dough we need by sitting tight."

O'Toole chuckled.

"Do you take me for a fool? I can handle things my own way, with Ferrell out of the way. I don't need you." His face softened a bit, and the gun dropped inches. "Besides, how do I know you won't turn yellow and give the whole thing away?"

Blake saw his chance to hit at O'Toole's one weakness.

"Wade is out of the way," he said swiftly. "I can return to South Station and assume control of the line with Ferrell out of the picture. You'll get half of everything we make."

O'Toole was weakening. He glanced out of the cab, toward the wooded side of the valley.

"You're just crooked enough to be on the level," he pocketed the electro gun. "In ten minutes we'll reach Loon Lake. Better get to that coupling."

Blake followed him back through the power car.

O'Toole turned once, and grinned wickedly.

"We'll have a devil of a time, you and I," he said. "Now, for a nice swimming party to Ferrell and his gang."

He hunched down over the coupling that separated the power units from the line of coaches. The simple coupling adjustment was under his doubled fist. Blake's eyes narrowed as the coupling started to come loose under the Irishman's grip. He lifted his heavy boot,

and silently brought it down on O'Toole's head.

The blow was executed coolly and without feeling. No quarter had been asked, and there was no pity in Blake's eyes as Holly O'Toole fell forward, face down. He lay still, arms outstretched over the slit between the cars. Blake pushed him forward, and saw the body drop quickly out of sight to the rail.

HE TURNED toward the cab and with feverish haste jerked down all three magnetic brake levers. Mono 6 shuddered through its entire length and seemed to settle backward against the screaming, protesting track. The flyer halted slowly, skidding sickeningly. Then outside, with the shrieking brakes silenced, Jeff could hear the soft lapping of water.

He rushed to the open window and looked down. They were on a long wharf, extending out over dark water. He looked back along the line of cars, shining faintly in the moonlight. A sigh of relief escaped his lips. Mono 6 was still on the rail. A scant three hundred feet beyond the last car was open water.

A shout of alarm came from somewhere back in the corridor of the car. Blake turned away from the window and went toward the coaches. At the door to the power room he stopped. Dauna Ferrell, her face flushed with relief came to him. He took her in his arms and held her close. He kissed her roughly, trying to make up for the loneliness and heartbreak he had caused.

Walter Ferrell was behind them.

"I hate to intrude," his face was bathed in a happy smile, "but wherever Wade is, I'm sure he wouldn't approve of his brother making love to my daughter, even if Jeff is somewhat of a hero right now."

Dauna released her hold on Blake's neck, and turned to her father. Blake's arms went around her waist and drew her close to him. She leaned her soft, curly head against his neck.

"Dad," she said, "brace yourself for an awful shock."

Ferrell laughed aloud.

"I know," he said. "You've given up Wade and are going to marry Jeff Blake instead."

Dauna half turned, and nuzzled her chin in Blake's brown neck.

"No," she said. "I'm going to marry Wade anyhow."

Ferrell was bewildered.

"But I don't see . . ." he stuttered.

"It's going to be confusing," Dauna told him. "But, try to understand. Jeff Blake, the *real* Jeff I mean, was killed a month ago, while holding up a space ship near Mars."

Ferrell acted for a moment as though he were going to faint. Then he got control over himself. He stared at Blake with unbelieving eyes.

"Then—you're—Wade . . .!"

BLAKE nodded.

"I couldn't seem to get a line on this Silver Mask gang," he admitted hesitantly. "When O'Toole wired Jeff to return I couldn't figure out why. O'Toole and I have both known that Jeff was a tramp and a space pirate. I knew one thing that O'Toole didn't. The space authorities informed me a month ago that Jeff was dead. I was suspicious of O'Toole from the first. I caught a local rocket and boarded the moon liner in space. With some artificial tan, a space uniform and a lot of bluff I managed to play the part. It fooled everyone but Dauna. She knew almost from the first, but she kept my secret."

Walter Ferrell backed into the lounge car. He sat down abruptly.

"I know you've done something I never thought possible," he admitted. "And to prove my gratitude I'll apologize for everything I've ever said against Wade Blake. From now on you're half owner of the 'Hope to Horn'."

Wade Blake grinned broadly.

"Thank you sir," he said. "But I can't accept your offer. If Dauna marries me she's destined to get star dust in her eyes."

Dauna looked at him worshipingly.

"In fact she already has flakes of it there now," Wade added. "Space officials have asked me to track down the gang who worked with my brother Jeff. If Dauna will say the word, I'd like to spend our honeymoon on Luna, and then get started on the new job."

Ferrell sighed deeply.

"I think Dauna has given her answer already," he said softly. "As for me, I'll have to make a public statement, taking back every word about Wade Blake and his love for flowers and the violin."

"That man Harror said we had a one way ticket to nowhere," Dauna said dreamily. "I wonder if we'll ever get there?"

"If we do," Wade told her, "I'm sure with you there, it's going to be a wonderful place."

THE END

AMERICA'S STRANGE COLONY

IN THE Ramapo hills of New Jersey, lives a colony of people who have isolated themselves as much as possible from the outside world. They are descendants of Englishmen who were brought to New York from the West Indies during the American Revolution. They finally settled in the Ramapo mountains where other polyglot types joined them. They have shunned any contacts with the rest of the world even so far as to do without the many useful things invented and used by the rest of the country. They inter-marry, which tends to keep the group all the closer together.

A public health nurse sent to the colony won their confidence and they treated her as a friend. She noticed that a great many of the children born in the colony had twelve fingers and twelve toes. Until the nurse had come, the people went through life with extra fingers and toes. They in turn, inter-married and passed this condition on to their children, until today more than fifty per cent of the children are born with too many fingers and toes.

The nurse has been bringing the children to Dr. Spencer T. Snedecor of Hackensack, New Jersey, who has operated on them to remove the extra digits. Another trait found in the group is the occurrence of web-fingers and toes which has also been treated by the doctor.

According to Dr. Snedecor, the patients are able to use their feet and hands normally without any pain after the operation.

MAKING A PROFIT ON GARBAGE

MOST cities in the United States dispose of the garbage collected regularly by means of huge city dumps, incinerators, and other methods. But Washington, D. C., finds that by processing certain portions of its garbage it pays big dividends.

The garbage was processed in a reduction plant to produce grease that has been piling up in lagoons. With the price of grease going from 3½ to 6½ cents a pound, the city decided a few months ago to sell one million pounds of their supply. Because of the war, the demand for the grease is growing by leaps and bounds which tends to drive up the price which today is over 9 cents a pound.

William Xanten, the supervisor of city refuse in Washington, says that about 45 pounds of grease are produced from each ton of garbage processed in the reduction plant. Since the plant handles about twenty thousand tons of garbage each year, almost a million pounds of grease are produced yearly.

If other cities were to handle their garbage in a similar manner, they would not only be earning a nice income, but they would also be aiding the war effort.

BUGS WILL BE BUGS!

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

Here's something about bugs that is worth knowing; things not generally known, but as true as they are amazing . . .

SCIENCE RESERVES A CONCERT

A MAJOR pest at outdoor gatherings during the summer months is the mosquito. But for the past seven years, the Essex County Symphony Society has been able to assure the patrons of their open air concerts that they would not be bothered by one mosquito.

How they do it is no mystery, but simply a resort to science to help solve a difficult situation. About an hour before each concert is to start, a substance called "New Jersey Larvicide Concentrate," made by the Seacoast Laboratories of New York, is sprayed with power sprayers under the stands where the patrons sit, on the bushes and trees, and under the bandstands.

The spray acts just like an anesthetic and puts every bug to "sleep," while the concert is in process. After the concert is over and the people have all gone home, the effects of the spray wear off and the revived bugs and mosquitos are just as good as new

HARDIEST OF ALL INSECTS

THE small, insignificant ant is a shining example of being able to stand up against the worst the elements can "dish out."

Dr. J. E. Eckert of the University of California, says that ants can go for months without food, live through the greatest frosts or during a forest fire, and even be under water for days without harm. One of the first form of life that "shows up" after a flood, a forest fire, or in the spring after the snows melt, is the hardy ant.

Beside all this rough living the ant lives to a ripe, old age for an insect. The workers have been known to pass six years while the queen ants average ten years, but have been known to reach fifteen years in some cases.

BACTERIA MENACE

IF YOU have always thought that bacteria in the air is the only time it is a menace, you are wrong. Dr. Claude E. ZoBell of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, LaJolla, California, is of the opinion that bacteria in the ocean consume more oxygen from the water than all the fish combined.

It may be hard to understand how such small microörganisms can use up so much oxygen but when you consider that each quart of ocean water, containing from 100,000 to 10,000,000 bacteria uses anywhere from 1/1000 to one cubic centimeter of oxygen each year and you multiply this small amount of oxygen by the number of quarts of water in the oceans, you can begin to appreciate the great amount of oxygen they can consume.

Moreover, oxygen, which is a vital necessity for all fish, can only reach great depths in the ocean by diffusing slowly from the surface. Most of this oxygen is quickly consumed by these bacteria before any fish can reach it. Dr. ZoBell offers this fact as a very important reason for the insufficient numbers of fish found in our oceans.

RIDDING THE HOME OF SILVERFISH

ARE you bothered in your home by silverfish, those small gray insects that eat cloth and paper? Then try this very simple method of getting rid of them suggested by Mr. Arnold Mallis, entomologist at the University of California.

All you have to do is get a small empty ointment jar from your medicine chest and wrap tape around the outside. This gives the silverfish something to grab onto in climbing. Inside the jar place a small amount of white flour, the favorite food of silverfish, and your trap is complete. The insects eagerly enter the jar to get the flour, but cannot crawl out of the jar since the inside walls afford no foothold. Mr. Mallis believes this is the most effective method of getting rid of the pests.

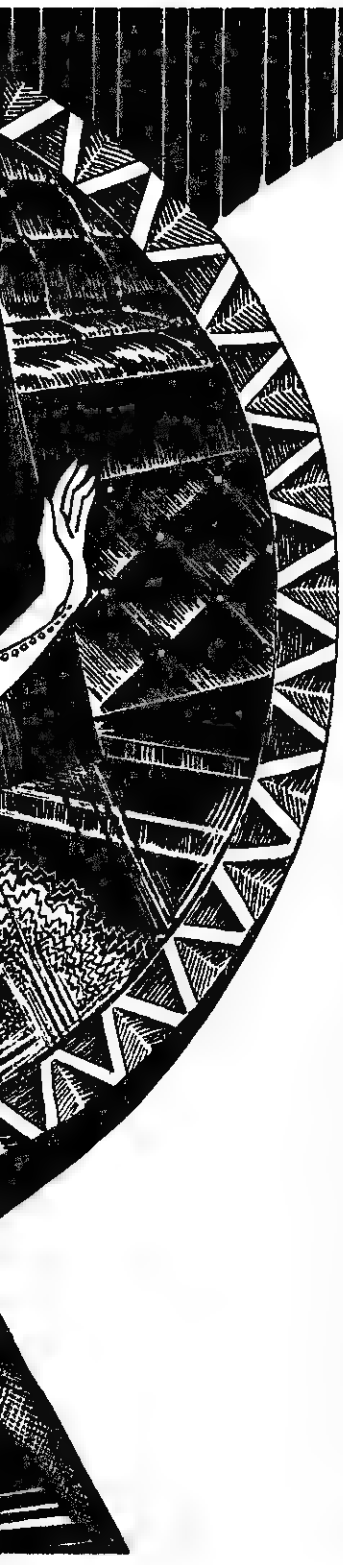
CONTROL OF ANOTHER ORCHARD PEST

A FEW years ago, the peach growers in the United States were having considerable trouble with the oriental fruit moth. The growers consulted various entomologists who recommended that the natural enemies of the pest be imported from Europe and Asia. To help this drive control the moth, the United States Department of Agriculture imported over 30 species of parasites, but found that these insects could not adapt themselves to their new homes very readily.

The entomologists continued their search and discovered that a native dwarf wasp was fighting the fruit moth with greater success than was the imported parasites. The only difficulty was that the fruit moth had spread to several regions where the wasp was not found. To aid the wasp in its battle against the fruit moth, entomologists carried these little warriors to all peach orchards invaded by the fruit moth.

The results were very satisfactory to the peach growers. The moths had been injuring over half of the peach crop but after the wasp was introduced, the loss was negligible. Just one more case of an American telling an oriental pest to clear out and stay out.

There in the mirror was an image that was NOT a reflection!



The TIME MIRROR

by CLARK SOUTH

Here was a strange mirror indeed! It reflected an image all right, but not an image from the same era in history!

PALE moonlight spilled through the window and over the wedding gifts that crowded the little room.

"And this mirror, darling?" Mark Carter asked. "Who sent it?"

A sudden flicker of worry flashed across Elaine Duchard's lovely face. She bit her lower lip nervously. Pretended to inspect a great silver punchbowl that stood on a nearby table.

"Who did you say sent the mirror?" her sweetheart repeated.

Still another moment of taut hesitation. At last:

"It's from Adrian Vance, Mark."

"Adrian Vance!"

Mark spat the name as if it were an epithet.

"Sshhh! Not so loud!" A pause. "He's an old friend, dear. I can't forbid him to send us a present. After all he's just trying to be polite."

The man's brown eyes were smouldering. "Those were fine company manners he showed off the night you told him you were going to marry me instead of him!"

Then, savagely:

"I should have knocked out a mouthful of that damned antique dealer's teeth right then! Of all the gall—threatening you; saying you'd regret turning him down—"

Again the girl silenced him.

"Adrian always expected to marry me," she reminded. "My refusal broke him up terribly. He was disappointed. Angry. So he said a lot of things he didn't really mean. Now he's trying to make up for it."

"I still don't like that damned Vance! He's just the kind of snake who'd figure out a way to get revenge. Something nideous—"

Elaine laid her hand gently across her fiance's mouth.

"You're acting jealous, Mark, and there's no need to," she said softly. "You won. Remember? I'm marrying you tomorrow!"

Mark's hands stole around her slim, supple waist and drew her to him. Her thinly-clad body was warm and fragrant in his arms.

"I guess I keep forgetting," he said huskily. "Part of me still can't quite seem to believe it's true. That we're going to be together always."

The girl's ripe lips curved in a little smile. Slender fingers caressed her sweetheart's tanned cheek.

"You can believe it now, Mark," she whispered. "I'm yours. All yours. Forever."

And then, ever so gently, she drew his head down. Their lips met. Clung with young love's ardor.

At last Mark straightened. He drew a deep breath.

"You'd better go to bed now, dear," he advised. "Tomorrow's going to be a hard day."

Another pause. Then a wry smile crossed his lips.

"Besides, your father might not understand why you're wandering around the house with me in the middle of the night, even though we are going to be married tomorrow. That outfit you're wearing is subject to a lot of misinterpretation."

ELAINE matched his smile with one of her own. She smoothed the diaphanous, curve-revealing negligee that displayed her charms to such advantage.

"Oh, he'd understand, all right," she retorted. "Only I'm afraid he'd understand a lot of things that aren't true." She gave vent to a dolorous sigh that the merriment sparkling in her blue eyes denied. "Father's all French, you know. He's quick to understand situations where young ladies appear *en deshabille.*"

They turned to go. But again the Vance mirror caught Mark's eye.

"Strange-looking affair, isn't it?" he commented.

Elaine nodded. Drawing a comb from some place of concealment about her, she seated herself on a bench before the glass.

A unique creation, that mirror. Circular and fully three feet in diameter, it now stood propped on top of a boudoir table. At first glance its surface somehow gave an impression of queer, concentric waves rippling through it. Yet the reflections it threw back were true; perfect.

The frame was just as paradoxical. It looked as if it once had been garishly ornate. Now, however, age had transmuted gaudiness to an indefinable antique charm.

"Isn't it lovely?" breathed Elaine. She drew the comb through her hair. Watched the mirror and the moonlight transform its golden beauty to a rippling cascade of silver. Mark stared, fascinated, over her shoulder.

"The moonlight's beautiful tonight, Mark!" the girl murmured. "It makes my hair dance in the glass like the waves of the sea." Her voice faded to nothingness. Her eyes were half-closed.

"Your hair is always beautiful, Elaine," her lover whispered, "and it's

no lovelier than all the rest of you, every inch." A moment's hesitation. "But we've got to get to bed, darling. There'll be so much running around tomorrow—"

"Mark!"

Shock was in that sudden exclamation. Shock, and a little lilt of panic. It burst from Elaine's half-parted lips like the *thunk* of a bullet slamming into a hardwood board.

The man jerked to attention. Caught the girl's smooth shoulders in his big hands.

"Elaine! What is it?"

"Look! The mirror!"

"The mirror?" Mark Carter's puzzled brown eyes sought the gleaming surface of the glass. "What—?"

"The reflection! Look!"

Mark stared. Went suddenly tense in stark amazement, eyes wide.

FOR there, gazing back at him out of the mirror, was a new Elaine. An Elaine who stood beside a great black coach, the like of which had never rolled American highways.

This woman's face was Elaine's. Yet there the resemblance ended. The filmy negligee of his own fiancee was replaced by the rich warmth of a scarlet satin gown and endless yards of white lace ruffles. The creamy skin of his own Elaine's bare arms came back as covered with long white gloves to above the elbows. A perky little hat, of scarlet satin to match the dress, and topped with a huge aigrette plume, rode proudly upon the elaborate coiffure of golden hair.

Nor was it only in superficials that the reflection differed.

The other woman had a character all her own, too. It showed in the tilt of her head, the way she stood, the expression on her lovely face.

But most of all it showed in her eyes.

Proud eyes, they were, and intelligent. They looked into Mark's own brown orbs calmly and without flinching. And they were not the eyes of his sweetheart. No. There was an indefinable *something* lurking deep in their cool blue depths that differentiated the reflection from Elaine. That made the woman in the glass another personality. Similar in many ways, yes. Fundamentally the same kind of person, yes.

But not Elaine.

Still Mark stared, mouth agape.

A feeling was growing within him. A strange conviction that he recognized this other Elaine.

"I've seen her before, some place!" he muttered half-aloud.

And then Elaine was speaking again.

"What is it, Mark? What's happened? Why does that mirror reflect back another woman?" The girl's voice carried a little quaver of bewilderment; of fear, almost. Her whole body trembled as if a chill were running through her.

Her voice jerked Mark from his paralysis. He turned sharply. His eyes probed into every corner of the moonlit room, seeking vainly for some clue to account for this impossible phenomenon —

"Mark, I'm afraid!"

Even in the dim light of the little chamber the man could see the color drain from his sweetheart's face as she spoke.

"I've got the most awful feeling down inside of me, Mark. As if that woman was in another world, and as if she was pulling me away from you and into it. My thoughts—they're not mine; they're hers! My mind's draining out of me. Don't let me go, Mark. Don't let me! I love you, Mark—"

"Light! That's what we need!" Mark exploded into action. Sprang toward the wall switch. "Hold on, Elaine.

Three hundred watts will drive that damned ghost away—"

". . . I'm falling! I'm falling! Oh, Mark, I love you so! Mark, help me! *Help!*"

THE girl's voice rose in a scream of wild terror. It tore at Mark's eardrums. Echoed through the stillness of the sleep-bound house like a banshee's wail.

The man's hand knocked up the switch. Flooded the room with light. Even as he did so he was whirling. Springing back to Elaine's side. And barely in time, for her backbone seemed to have turned to water. Her limp body was slipping to the floor in a nerveless heap, her muscles slack and unresponding. By a miracle of balance, Mark's hands caught her in time to break the force of her fall. He lifted her, unresisting, in his arms. Her ashen lips still were moving in the faintest of whispers—

". . . *je t'aime, mon cher, je t'aime* . . ."

Her voice trailed off. A great sigh shook her. She lay unconscious in his arms.

Mark's brain was spinning like a top within his skull. He was breathing hard, and he was trembling, as if he had just run a long way.

". . . I love you, my dear, I love you . . ."

That was what she had said.

But why had she spoken in French?

Even as he hesitated in an agony of indecision, the door burst open. The frail, white-haired figure of Professor Duchard, Elaine's father, stumbled into the room. His eyes were sleep-fogged, and spindly, pajama-clad legs showed below the dressing gown he had thrown about his thin shoulders.

"What is it? What has happened?" he mumbled. Even in his dazed state, he pronounced every syllable. There were no slurrings nor contractions in Professor Duchard's punctilious vocabulary.

"Elaine's fainted."

"Then carry her to her room. I shall get smelling salts from the medicine cabinet."

Turning, the professor scurried away. Mark followed, Elaine's soft body still limp and yielding in his arms. Ascending the stairs to her room, he laid her tenderly on the bed. Even as he did so, the girl's father hurried to his side, a dark green bottle in his hand. The old man was more fully awake now, and he looked down at his daughter with keen, intelligent eyes. Although outwardly he appeared calm, there was a little flicker of worry deep within those sharp blue optics.

"This should revive her!" he announced, waving the bottle. Pulling out the glass stopper, he held the container close under the girl's nose.

Elaine drew a little breath. The fumes swirled into her nostrils. She choked. Jerked spasmodically.

And slumped back, still unconscious!

Again the professor applied the carbonate of ammonium.

Again the results were the same.

The old man straightened.

"I do not like this," he clipped. "You had better tell me just what happened."

Mark shifted nervously under the scrutiny of the sharp blue eyes.

"Start at the beginning," the professor commanded. "I want to know from exactly what this 'fainting spell' resulted."

THE younger man nodded slowly.

"It all began after you went to bed," he explained. "I said good-night to Elaine, then decided to step outside and have a smoke before I turned in myself.

"When I got upstairs, Elaine opened her door. She already was undressed—had on the negligee she's wearing now. She said she wasn't sleepy, and that she'd decided to come back down for another look at the presents. So I came along. . . ."

Carefully, yet concisely, Mark outlined the events which had preceded the girl's collapse. When he had finished, Professor Duchard looked even more worried than before.

"I do not like what you tell me," he informed the younger man. "I believe this is a case for a doctor. A good one. I have a friend who is a neurologist. I shall call him."

He disappeared toward the telephone.

Not once in the half-hour preceding the specialist's arrival did the girl stir. She lay upon the big double bed like a lovely corpse, unmoving save for the slight rise and fall of her breasts as she breathed.

The neurologist examined her with keen interest.

"A remarkable case!" he declared. "Her pulse and respiration have slowed to the point where they are scarcely apparent."

Professor Duchard nodded slowly.

"But what does it mean?" exploded Mark, beside him, his handsome young face pale and haggard. "Why can't you revive her?"

The doctor frowned, pinched his chin thoughtfully.

"A remarkable case!" he repeated slowly. "To be frank about it, I can't find the slightest clue as to what's wrong. She seems in a perfect state of health. Organically I can detect no possible cause for this coma. Yet she doesn't respond to any resuscitatory measures."

"But there must be something—"

The specialist shot Mark a disapproving glance. Without a word he opened his bag, taking from it a smaller case of instruments. He selected a long, slender dissecting needle. Plunged its point into a bottle of disinfectant.

"Watch me!" he commanded.

Turning to the bed, he plunged the needle an eighth of an inch into the unconsicous girl's breast!

Mark's eyes went wide with horror. He started forward. Found himself halted by Professor Duchard's hand.

"You asked a question, Mark!" the white-haired scientist rapped. "The doctor merely is giving you his answer. Look at her!"

Elaine had not stirred! If anything, she lay even more still than before, not a muscle so much as quivering. Her eyes were closed, her face calm, her golden hair halo-like about her head.

The neurologist bared her thigh. Again plunged in the needle.

She did not move.

A dozen times the physician pricked her, moving over the white surface of her body from one nerve center to another. At last he straightened.

"YOU see?" he demanded grimly. "Anaesthesia is complete. She feels nothing."

Mark's eyes were horror-stricken. He was breathing hard.

"What does it mean, doctor?" he choked. "What's happened to her?"

The medical man motioned him closer.

"Touch her!" he ordered.

Half-afraid, Mark bent forward. He rested his trembling fingers against the girl's breast. The next instant he jerked back, his face gray with shock.

"My God!" he gasped. "She's dead! Her body's getting cold! She's dead!" His face twisted in a grimace of emotional agony.

"No!" contradicted the neurologist.

"What!"

"No," repeated the other. "She's not dead, young man."

"Then what—"

"The closest I can come to it in language you'd understand is to say that she's falling into a state of suspended animation," the doctor answered. "Her bodily functions are slowing down. I believe this will continue—that eventually her muscles will tighten into catalepsy."

"What will happen eventually?" Professor Duchard broke in.

The neurologist shrugged. "I don't know, professor. My hope is that she simply will continue to lie in a coma. But there is always the possibility that the thread of life will break. That she will die without recovering consciousness—"

"You can't let her!" cried Mark hysterically, unable to restrain himself longer. "She musn't die! She musn't! You've got to do something, doctor! There must be a way—"

"—if it can be found!" interrupted Professor Duchard. He again gripped the younger man's arm. "Do not let yourself go to pieces, my boy. That will not help.

"Because you, yourself, are a man of action, you want our friend, here, to prescribe for Elaine with the same speed and certainty that you would go after a hot news story. Only that is not the way of science, Mark. We must be patient and hope for the best, content in the knowledge that everything possible is being done for Elaine."

He turned to the neurologist.

"What do you recommend, doctor?"

"There's only one thing to do, Professor Duchard. We must place the girl in a hospital, where she can be taken care of properly and kept under observation."

The aged scientist nodded. "Yes. I thought that would be your suggestion."

"If you'll excuse me," the doctor continued, "I shall use your telephone to make the necessary arrangements."

He left the room.

BESIDE the bed, Mark Carter still stared dumbly down at the girl he loved. The girl who tomorrow—no, today, for it was nearly morning now—was to have become his wife. He tried to speak, but his throat was too twisted and thick with pain for words to come. His broad shoulders were slumped. His brown eyes blurred with tears. A queer, strained sound of awful grief tore itself from somewhere deep within his chest, like the moan of an animal in torment.

A hand touched his shoulder.

"Come, Mark. We can do no more good here."

Mute, stumbling, broken, Mark allowed Professor Duchard to lead him from the room. Down the hall. Into the old man's study.

"Sit down, my boy, and pull yourself together."

Mark dropped into the cool, fragrant depths of a timeworn leather chair. The professor relaxed in another.

"I want you to tell me your story again," Elaine's father said. "Think back carefully. Give me every detail."

Slowly, spiritlessly, Mark forced himself to concentrate on the happenings of the evening. His voice a dull monotone, he again recounted his story.

"This woman," probed Professor Duchard, his bright blue eyes stabbing into the other's brown orbs. "Tell me about her. What did she look like?"

Mark shrugged.

"She was only a reflection in a mirror, professor. It was Elaine. Probably the lighting gave me the illusion of someone else."

"Cease thinking of her as a reflection!" the savant retorted, his voice

suddenly sharp. "You are a newspaperman by trade. You have been trained to observe closely. I want you to use those powers now. Think of this woman as a person. Describe her to to me as if she were one—"

"She looked like Elaine," said Mark, racking his brain for details. "She looked just like her. Only different, the way two identical twins are different. You know what I mean, professor? The way a person's individual personality sticks out of him in spite of his appearance—"

"Yes. I quite understand."

"Well, that was the way it was with this woman. She was Elaine, but she wasn't. There was something about her that didn't belong to Elaine." His brows knitted. "It seemed as if I'd seen her before, somewhere. Just like I'd known her, but couldn't remember just when or where."

A pause.

"It was her clothing that made us notice her, though. She wore a red satin dress with more white ruffles than I ever saw before. She had a red hat, too, with a big plume. Her hair was done in a different style than I've ever seen. All fixed up. And she wore gloves that reached to above her elbow."

He searched his weary mind for more details. Gave it up in despair,

"I don't know, professor. I can't remember any more. She was just like a picture of one of the women attending a Louis XVI ball in France—"

A SUDDEN light sprang into his brown eyes. He stopped short in mid-sentence.

"That's it!" he cried. "I've got it! I know where I saw her before!"

Professor Duchard leaned forward, blue eyes flashing.

"Where?" he demanded. "Hurry, man! Out with it!"

"You've got a picture of her!" Mark exclaimed excitedly. "Right here, in this study!" He half-rose from the leather chair. Peered into the corner behind him.

"It's gone!"

The professor's face was suddenly pale.

"That picture called 'Elaine Duchard's Escape'? The Jerbette? Is that the one you mean?"

"That's it. That's the one. Where is it?"

"It is gone," the savant answered grimly. "A genuine painting by Gustav Jerbette is worth a great deal of money. And I am not a wealthy man. When Adrian Vance offered to buy it—"

"Adrian Vance! That snake! He's the one who gave Elaine the mirror—"

The white-haired scientist was on his feet, his eyes suddenly very bright and cold. The veins stood out at his temples.

"I want to see that mirror!" he rapped. "This is the first time you have mentioned that it was he who sent it. Come on!"

Together they hurried down the stairs to the little room where the wedding gifts were on display. Mark started across toward the mirror. The professor's hand shot out. Caught the younger man's arm.

"Stand back!" he cried in a terrible voice. "Do not go near that mirror. Above all, do not pass in front of it!"

Mark stared at the savant open-mouthed. His earlier black despair was gone, now, replaced by sudden, inexplicable hope.

"Why not? What's wrong?"

The other licked dry lips.

"Nothing, I hope. The chances are a thousand to one that I am wrong.

Yet an idea came to me, my boy.. An incredible idea, and a horrible one. And if it is right"—he shook his head slowly —"may God have mercy on Elaine!"

Carefully, then, they approached the mirror. The professor studied it through narrowed eyes from a vantage-point far to one side. At last he turned to Mark.

"Do you notice any defects or flaws in the surface of that glass?" he demanded.

His daughter's fiance nodded.

"The whole thing's out of kilter, professor."

"How would you describe it? What do you mean by 'out of kilter'?"

MARK considered for a moment. Then:

"The impression I get is that this mirror was *poured* into a circular form, instead of being cut to shape. And that while it was still molten, something struck it in the center, so that little ripples formed in the glass, all the way from the center to the outer edge."

It was the scientist's turn to nod.

"Precisely my own view."

Moving away, he selected a candlestick and candle from among the gifts on display. He handed it to Mark.

"I want you to move this stick in front of that glass," he instructed. "However, you must be careful to stand well to one side, so that you, yourself, will not be reflected."

"What's the angle, professor? What do you expect to find? What's wrong with this mirror?"

The elder man shook his head, moved to a point where he could watch the surface of the glass.

"I do not know what to expect," he said. "I may be completely on the wrong track."

But his flashing eyes denied the words.

Seething with curiosity and excitement though he was, Mark carefully carried out his instructions. He moved the candlestick back and forth and up and down until it had been reflected from every inch of the mirror. And the farther he progressed, the more excited Elaine's father became.

"The reflection is perfect!" the old man cried. "It is true! Nowhere is there a single sign of distortion!"

"Yes. Of course it's true." Mark was a little bewildered. "Why shouldn't it be? Isn't every looking-glass supposed to throw back a reasonably exact image?"

"Of course, of course!" The scientist was impatient. "But can you not see the difference?"

"The difference? What difference?"

"Mark: this is not an ordinary mirror. That is what I mean! It denies every law of optics! Glass as full of waves and ripples as this apparently is should return hideously distorted reflections. Yet it does not do so!"

"But what—"

"We shall see. Come on! Bring the mirror to my laboratory."

Hesitating only long enough to throw a tablecloth across the face of the glass, the old man hurried out. Mark strode along in his wake, the heavy mirror in his arms. Together, they left the house and followed the bricked path to the little laboratory structure located at the far end of the lot.

"Set it down here, in this rack," the professor instructed, indicating an easel-like arrangement in one corner. He himself wheeled a strange electrical apparatus into position in front of the glass. Then took up a position behind a large glass screen, and motioned Mark to join him.

"What are you going to do?"

"You shall see!"

THE white-haired savant threw a switch. The laboratory's lights went out. He pressed a button on the control board of the apparatus behind which they stood. Leaned forward eagerly, peering through the glass screen at the mirror. Manipulated dials and levers.

An inexplicable excitement gripped Mark. He had a sudden, unshakable conviction that he and the professor were on the verge of incredible discoveries. Discoveries that would lead him to an explanation of the strange coma that held Elaine in its grim sway.

His brown eyes fastened on the mirror. The next instant they went wide with astonishment.

The glass screen behind which he and the professor were standing was clearly reflected.

But it was merely an opaque surface! Neither he nor the scientist could be seen behind it!

As if reading his mind, Professor Duchard gave vent to a little laugh.

"'One-way' glass," he explained. "It permits vision in only one direction." Then the humor went out of his voice. "We may thank God that science developed it before we are through."

Again he leaned forward, his eyes on the mirror.

An instant later he leveled a quivering forefinger.

"Look!"

There, in the semi-darkness where stood the looking-glass, a weird figure was beginning to glow!

Tension flooded through Mark's veins. His fingers knotted into fists. His eyes strained to catch the thing which grew upon the mirror's surface.

Slowly, like some wizard's evil phantasmagoria, the glowing lines came together. Took form. Painted a figure—

The figure of the woman in the mirror!

"That's her!" he cried excitedly. "That's the woman we saw reflected instead of Elaine!"

Professor Duchard snapped off the machine beside him. He turned on the lights. Swung around to face his daughter's fiance. His face was grey. Grim lines of worry etched deep into the flesh.

"So that is it!" he said. "That is what he has done to her!"

There was fear in his voice . . . living, breathing fear. That and despair. The despair of utter hopelessness. His shoulders sagged with it. The sparkle had gone out of his eyes.

Mark gripped the old man's arm. Blood lust flamed in his own brown orbs. Every muscle was taut. The cords in his neck stood out like knotted ropes.

"What is it?" he demanded savagely. "Is it Vance? What has he done to her?"

Wearily, the scientist pulled his arm away and gestured the other to a seat.

"I shall tell you," he said. "You will not believe me, but I shall tell you."

"Yes. Go on. I'll decide for myself whether I'll believe you or not."

The professor stared into Mark's eyes.

"How much do you know about time?" he demanded.

"TIME?"

"Yes. And time travel."

The younger man shrugged.

"Practically nothing," he admitted. "Oh, I've read a few stories, of course. But that's all. I don't know what the theory of it all is, if that's what you mean."

"I thought so." Professor Duchard sighed. "That being the case, there is little use in my wasting energy trying to give you any real understanding of it.

"However, I can tell you this: time is not the immutable thing most people presume it to be. Actually, it is only another dimension. As a research physicist, I have for many years been convinced of this."

"You mean that time travel really is possible? That men can be transported into the future or the past—"

The other held up a restraining hand.

"Yes. Time travel *is* possible, if men could break through into that other dimension." A pause. "Yet up until tonight, I never believed that man had found a way to pass that barrier."

"But professor! Think what you're saying! You're telling me that I could go back and murder my own grandfather. That I could prevent myself from being born—"

Again the elder man sighed.

"I was afraid of this," he said. "I knew you could not understand." He hesitated. Then: "At any rate, take my word for it that time travel is possible. Also, I assure you that there are any number of perfectly sound theoretical and practical reasons why you never could hope to murder your grandparents."

The other brushed the words aside.

"What about Elaine? What's all this got to do with her?"

"Everything. You see, my boy, it is *not* possible for us to transport our material bodies across time. They cannot bridge the gap. They must remain in the period in which they are born—"

"But Elaine—"

Never had Mark seen the white-haired savant so solemn. His aged face was drawn with worry. Yet there was terrifying self-confidence in his words.

"Elaine," he said quietly, "at this moment is trapped in time!"

THERE was a moment of stunned silence, then. Mark's brain was spinning. He stared at Professor Duchard through narrowed eyes, half-convinced that the man was mad. And yet—

"I am not insane," the scientist declared, as if answering an unspoken question. "Believe me, my boy, I am not."

"Go on."

"That mirror which Adrian Vance sent to my daughter actually is a crude time machine. A device for transporting a human soul to another period. Who devised it I cannot say. I believe it is old, and that Vance came upon it only by chance."

"But it isn't a machine. It's just a mirror—"

"Yet it is the gate through which a mind may be reflected into past or future. All that is needed is a focal point. A person to receive that mind. In this case, Adrian Vance made the focal point one of my ancestors, the first Elaine Duchard."

"The first Elaine Duchard!"

"Yes. She was the woman in the picture. And the woman whose image we now find imprinted in that devil's mirror."

"But how—"

"You remember how Adrian Vance swore vengeance when Elaine refused to marry him." The aged savant's voice choked with anger. "This must be what he planned. He bought the picture Gustav Jerbette painted of my ancestor. Then, by some process, imprinted her portrait in the center of this mirror, whose secret he somehow discovered. Apparently the picture does not show except at a certain angle. Perhaps only my daughter's coloring or facial configuration would ordinarily bring it out." He shrugged. "That I do not know."

Mark nodded slowly. He was breathing hard, his eyes dark with anger.

"At any rate," the other continued, "Elaine tonight looked into the mirror. By some accident—an accident Vance had counted on taking place eventually, of course—, she happened to get exactly the right angle. She saw her ancestor. Her mind flashed back through time, into that other Elaine Duchard's brain—"

And then, all at once, the old man's iron will cracked.

"She is trapped!" he cried in a voice like the wail of a north wind through the pines. "She is trapped in the body of that first Elaine Duchard, while her own lies here, a useless, unconscious husk! She will die, as our ancestor died—"

"What do you mean? How did the first Elaine Duchard die?" Mark was on his feet, fists clenched.

Professor Duchard sat slumped forward, his face buried in his hands, white hair awry.

"She was a tragic figure," he mumbled. "You saw her picture. You know how beautiful she was.

"She came from a minor family of the French nobility, but she loved a young Jacobin—a man such as those who, a few years later, overthrew the monarchy and founded the French republic.

"She had another suitor, however. A Baron Morriere. When he learned that she was going to marry another, he kidnapped her the night before her wedding. Her lover was present at the time, and was nearly killed trying to protect her. Later he returned to help her escape from the Chateau Morriere. They succeeded in getting away.

"But the baron's guards tracked them down and murdered them both two days later. And Gustav Jerbette gained his first renown—he was then but a young student—when he immortalized them by painting his famous picture, 'Elaine Duchard's Escape'."

"And now Elaine—"

THE old man straightened wearily.

"Our Elaine will die," he said. "Her mind will be wiped out when the Morriere pikes stab through my ancestor's body."

"There must be some way of calling her back—"

"If there is, I do not know it." He shook his head. "No. There is nothing we can do."

"We can try!"

Mark's voice rang out like the clang of a great iron bell, echoing with grim resolve. His tanned jaw jutted hard with determination. His eyes flashed brown fire.

Elaine's father let his hands fall in a hopeless gesture.

"What is there to try, my boy? Elaine's mind is gone, back a hundred and fifty years into the past. Her body lies unconscious in a hospital. What can we do?"

A savage, humorless smile played over the other's lips.

"Earlier this evening you said I was a man of action," he told the savant tautly. "You said I knew how to handle things I knew about. Well, I think it's time for action. Real action!"

"But what action can we take? What can—"

"Who's responsible for what's happened to Elaine?"

"Responsible? Adrian Vance is responsible, of course. There is too much evidence for it to be coincidence—"

"Right!" Mark's eyes were black with rage. "That snake planned this. He said he'd get revenge. This"—he gestured toward the mirror—"is his way of doing it!"

"All this is rather obvious," the scientist commented wearily. "But the

fact that Vance is guilty of this atrocity does us no good. Nor does it help Elaine—"

"But it will!"

"It will? How?"

The younger man hunched forward tensely.

"We're going to catch that devil and strangle an answer out of him!" he grated. "We're going to make him tell us how to bring Elaine safely back to 1942!"

"And if he does not know how? If he cannot help us?"

"That'll be too bad. Because then we'll just keep on strangling him" He laughed harshly. "Oh, yes. Vance may win. We may not be able to save Elaine. But"—and his face was terrible to see—"Vance certainly won't live long enough to gloat much!"

A spark of hope sprang into Professor Duchard's blue eyes.

"I wish I could believe you—"

"Forget it. We've got more important things to do than wishing. Look out that window!"

THE white-haired scientist turned to the casement toward which the other pointed. Saw dawn reddening the eastern sky.

"It's morning already," Mark went on determinedly. "In a few hours more, we can start things rolling by having you call up Vance."

"Call up Vance? What would I say?"

The devil's bitter mirth played in the other's eyes. But it was a mirth spiked with menace.

"Simple. Just don't let on anything's wrong. Pretend that the wedding's to come off as scheduled. Then tell him that things are in a mess. All the excitement's got you tied in a knot. Because he's such a close friend of Elaine's, you thought maybe he'd be willing to lend a hand."

The spark of hope in the professor's eyes brightened to a glowing coal.

"I wonder . . ." he mused. "It might work—"

"Of course it'll work. It's got to. It's the only chance we have . . ."

It was nine fifteen precisely when Adrian Vance rang the doorbell. He stepped back. Polished the nails of his right hand on the grey suede glove which still garbed the left.

The door swung open.

"Good morning, professor."

"Good morning, Adrian." The savant stepped aside. "Please come in."

Not by the slightest vocal tremor or change of expression did the old man hint of his secret—that if necessary Adrian Vance would never leave this place alive!

"It is kind of you to come," he told the antiquarian as he led the way toward the back of the dwelling. "I never knew that a wedding could cause so much turmoil." He chuckled softly. "Of course, I have had little experience in such matters, my wife being dead and Elaine an only child. And my own nuptials were celebrated a good many years ago."

Every word, every inflection, was perfect. No actor could have matched that sinister soliloquy.

Vance smoothed the sleek black hair that at once crowned and characterized him.

"It's a great privilege to be allowed to assist in any way at Elaine's wedding," he observed unctuously. "Anything which I can do to help make this a happier occasion for her is a pleasure."

Blue fire flared in the scientist's eyes. He looked away quickly.

A moment later his composure was regained.

"There are some things in the laboratory I wish to bring to the house,"

he announced. "If you will come this way—" He opened the back door. Led the antique dealer down the brick walk to the laboratory.

Together, they stepped inside.

The door swung shut. In the silence its jarring slam echoed like a shot fired in a tomb.

Vance cleared his throat.

"So this is your laboratory, professor—"

MARK CARTER stepped out of the shadows. His tanned face looked as if it had been carved from the rock of ages. His eyes were pools of sudden death.

He spoke:

"Elaine's gone, Vance. Through the mirror. We want her back."

Just that. Nothing more. But suddenly Vance was shaking.

"What are you talking about? I don't know what you mean."

Professor Duchard said:

"You are lying. I have examined the mirror. I tested with black light. It showed the picture of the first Elaine Duchard."

"You're mad," said Vance. "You don't make sense."

"I fear I make too much sense, Adrian Vance. I wish I could disbelieve my own mind. But I cannot. I know that you have found a way to pass the barrier between space and time. I know that you have projected Elaine's mind into the past, leaving her body behind in a state of suspended animation."

"And we want her back, Vance," Mark broke in. "We want her back right now!"

He was moving forward, a juggernaut of menace, clenched fists half-raised.

"Keep away from me!" the antiquarian shrilled. His greasy face was paste-colored with terror. "Keep away! Don't touch me!"

The other caught his shoulders. Shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Tell us!" he thundered. "Tell us how to bring her back!"

"I don't know what you're talking about! There wasn't anything wrong with the mirror I sent Elaine!"

"Tell us—"

The professor caught Mark's arm.

"Stop!" he begged. "Do not hurt him. There is a better way."

"A better way? What do you mean?"

The scientist turned to Vance.

"I am sure you are telling the truth," he said. "I feel certain the mirror is harmless." His tone was silky. A thin smile rippled across his aged face.

He was like a cat playing with a mouse.

"Only our friend, young Mr. Carter, remains to be convinced," he went on. "However, we shall have no difficulty in proving him wrong."

Adrian Vance stared at the professor in terrified fascination. His lips moved, but no words came.

The savant hurried across to an ancient desk which stood in one corner. Rummaged through it. Came back with a big sheet of heavy paper.

"Over there," said the professor—gesturing toward the spot where the mirror still stood upon the easel, again shrouded by the tablecloth—"is the glass that has caused all the trouble."

He smiled sympathetically at Vance.

"All so unnecessary, too, Adrian!"

"Unnecessary?"

"Of course. We shall demonstrate to Mark right now that it is not a means of time travel."

"Demonstrate?" Vance was shaking again. "How?"

AGAIN the professor smiled.

"Oh, very simply. I have here"—he held up the heavy paper—"a

lithographed portrait of the late General George A. Custer. You will recall he was killed by Indians at the battle of Little Big Horn—popularly known as Custer's last stand."

Vance's teeth suddenly were chattering.

"We shall hang this picture on your chest, Adrian," Professor Duchard went on. "Then we shall stand you in front of that mirror and give you a chance to concentrate on the reflection." He chuckled softly. "Of course, since the mirror has nothing to do with time travel, you need have no fear of your mind leaving your body and going back to that of General Custer, and death in a Sioux massacre—"

Without warning, Vance erupted into action.

As if by magic, the panic fled his face. His features contorted with hate. His eyes suddenly were glistening pinpoints of jet.

And even faster moved his sinuous body. He snaked free of Mark's restraining grasp. Sprang back like a wounded tiger. His right hand darted under his coat to his left armpit like a Gila monster streaking for cover.

Mark Carter's lips twisted in a snarl of rage. He lunged after the antiquarian, big fists balled and deadly.

"Look out!"

It was Professor Duchard, his voice a shrill warning blast.

Mark's eyes shifted. He caught the sudden spearing movement of Vance's right hand. Lashed out in savage fury to meet the new threat.

The antiquarian shrank back. The other's fist drove by him. Missed him by a hair.

And then his right hand was back in view. Back, and gripping the butt of a long-barreled Smith & Wesson Magnum. His teeth were bared in a grimace of hideous triumph.

Like a rattlesnake striking, he slashed out with the heavy gun. Brought it down at his adversary's head in a vicious blow.

Mark still reeled, off balance, from his own missed blow. But he saw the gun descending. Threw up his arm to ward it off.

The barrel caught him at the juncture of shoulder and collar bones. Sent screaming pain stabbing to the farthest reaches of his brain. Paralyzed his whole side. He staggered drunkenly.

Again that triumphant leer contorted Vance's hatchet face. Once more he whipped the pistol barrel down.

And this time his aim was true. This time the heavy gun slammed home square at the base of the other's brain.

The universe was exploding inside Mark's skull. A crimson universe, with planets that burst into bloody flame. His control centers went numb. The life vanished from his muscles. He felt himself falling . . . falling . . . falling . . .

AS if in some macabre nightmare, he heard Adrian Vance laugh. Saw the antiquarian step back and bring the gun in his hand to bear on Professor Duchard.

"So you're going to force me to bring Elaine back to the twentieth century!" the rejected suitor mocked. "So you think you still have a chance to save her from death at the hands of Baron Morriere's retainers!"

The old man's eyes were like blue steel as he met the antiquarian's gaze.

"You devil!" he said. "You admit it! You have killed her!"

Vance nodded, his narrow face sinister.

"Of course I admit it. Why shouldn't I? What is there you can do about it? Or do you think the police are going to hold me on a charge of sub-

jecting your daughter to involuntary time travel by sending her a mirror?" He laughed harshly, smoothed his sleek black hair. Then continued:

"Yes, professor. Go to the police. Tell them all about my hideous crimes." Again he laughed. "See how long it takes them to put you under psychiatric observation."

The aged scientist's lips quivered with passion and despair.

"Why do you stay?" he cried. "You have won. Why do you mock us? Go away! Let us alone!"

"Oh, no." The other shook his head. "I don't want to leave just yet, professor. There are still some things I have to tell you. Things I learned while making preparations for Elaine's little trip."

He paused to gloat.

"How thoroughly have you investigated the case of that first Elaine Duchard, in whose body your daughter now resides, Professor Duchard?" he demanded.

The white-haired savant did not even answer. He leaned weakly against a laboratory bench, a broken man.

"Did you know, for instance," Adrian Vance continued, "that Baron Morriere's men tortured Elaine Duchard before they murdered her?"

"You fiend! Not even a savage would do a thing like that!"

Vance chuckled evilly.

"You exaggerate," he sneered. "Besides, Elaine's sweetheart, here"—he prodded the still-prone Mark with his foot—"no doubt will protect her."

His face darkened.

"And if you did not want harm to befall her, why did you let her reject me when I asked to marry her? I gave her her chance. When she didn't take it, what else could she expect but my revenge?"

"Go away. Please go away."

ON the floor, Mark stirred uneasily. His brain was clear now, though his head throbbed like a jungle tom-tom under the beat of a mad witch doctor. Slowly, he tried his muscles. Tensed them. Relaxed them. Tested them for complete control.

Vance said:

"In case you still have any notions of rescuing your daughter from the far reaches of time, professor, forget them now. It's impossible to call a person back. In the first place, a time mirror would be needed—and the only one in existence, the one I bought from a French sorcerer who once studied under Eliphas Levi, now stands on that easel in the corner."

Sobs racked the other's frail form. He still leaned against the bench, his face buried in his hands.

But on the floor, Mark Carter's jaw grew hard. He readied himself for a savage leap.

"Furthermore," their captor went on, "your precious Elaine remembers nothing of her life in this century. For all practical purposes she has become the first Elaine Duchard. I know this, because I tried out the mirror by sending one of my clerks three months into the past. He was possessed by a strange amnesia that left his mind a perfect blank so far as what had happened in those three months was concerned!"

The antiquarian paused, savoring the full effect of his words on Elaine's father with evil glee. His black eyes were shining with hell's own fire.

And in that tense, silent second, Mark Carter struck.

He came off the floor like a tiger springing, and the roar of a jungle beast was in his throat. His arms shot out to embrace Adrian Vance's legs and pull

him down. His fingers hungered for the feel of his enemy's throat.

He was still in the air when the other moved. Like lightning, Vance leaped aside. Away from Mark's clutching hands. He landed, tense and poised, the gun in his fist sighted on young Carter's chest, a grin of triumph splitting his oily face.

"Did you think I was asleep, you fool?" he crowed. "Did you think I wasn't watching you every second out of the corner of my eye? I've been ready to kill you from the moment your eyelids first fluttered!"

Mute, his face still livid with hate, Mark staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" Vance challenged. "If you think you can jump me before I pull the trigger, come ahead! I'll be glad to take my chances before a jury when you're dead!"

Elaine's fiance glared helplessly. His fists clenched and relaxed again and again.

"You win," he said at last, his face grey beneath its tan. "Go on. Get out. You've got us licked."

But the antiquarian shook his head.

"Not quite yet," he answered. "I've still got one job to do."

Then, so fast the eye could hardly follow, his gun-hand came up.

Bang-bang-bang!

THREE shots he fired. Three shots, straight toward the easel in the corner. Dead center into the mirror that stood upon it.

There was a wild tinkling of falling glass. The tablecloth slipped away. Revealed the shattered remnants of the time mirror.

"I'm taking no chances!" cried Vance. "Professor Duchard's reputation as a research physicist is too high." And then, mockingly: "However, I doubt that even he can make any good use of that mirror now!"

With that final sally, he backed away and out the door, the Magnum in his hand still grim and unwavering as he covered Mark and the old scientist.

Curtly:

"I wouldn't come out too soon if I were you."

The door slammed shut.

Mark started forward. But the professor caught his arm.

"It is useless," the savant said. "To follow him would bring death and would avail nothing, my boy. He has won."

Like men in a daze, then, they stared into each other's eyes. They saw only dull hopelessness. The last spark was gone out.

Slowly, Mark walked over to the corner where stood the shattered mirror. Looked blankly down at its fragments. Bending, he picked up a splinter. Inspected it idly.

The next instant he whirled about.

"Professor Duchard!" he rapped. "How did this devil's looking-glass work?"

The scientist looked up dispiritedly, shrugged.

"I could not make you understand. It is a complicated matter of space-time theory—"

The other strode back to him. Gripped his shoulder.

"I don't care about the details. Just try to give me a simplified version of the principle."

Professor Duchard gazed into the younger man's eyes. Caught the fierce light within them—the gleam of spirit that marks those who will not be downed for long, no matter what the odds. The ray of struggle that only death could take away.

For a long moment, then, the old man sat buried in thought. At last he looked up again. Broke the silence.

"Have you ever seen the physical

experiment in which a wave of sound is used to break a glass?"

"No. But I've heard of it. I know what you're talking about."

"Very well, then. Imagine, if you can, that the barrier between space and time is that glass. It is apparently impenetrable."

"I see." Elaine's fiance nodded eagerly.

"Then try to conceive of a terrific wave of energy being concentrated against it, just as the sound wave is concentrated on the glass. But this time, the wave must be so manipulated as to strike the barrier as a pebble strikes and breaks a window. Otherwise it would be too weak to break through. Or, if it was strong enough, it would break down the entire space-time relationship."

AGAIN Mark nodded, this time more slowly.

"You mean that the wave of energy really must be like a sword, stabbing one small hole through the barrier?"

"Exactly." A pause. "The time mirror represented just such a hole through the barrier. What appeared to us to be waves in the glass actually were frozen ripples in the space-time continuum—just as if you had dropped a stone in water, and the hole and ripples had frozen."

"Then when you looked into the mirror—"

"Your mind went out through that gap in the barrier. Ordinarily, of course, you would not even know that this was happening. But if your mind was concentrated on something in the past or future—as Elaine's was upon the picture of her ancestor—, you were automatically hurtled through time to that period."

The younger man frowned.

"Then why didn't my mind go, too, when Elaine's did? We both were looking into the mirror."

"But from different angles," the professor reminded him. "Remember, the actual break in the continuum was relatively small. Elaine, seated before the mirror, must have been directly in front of the gap, so she was sucked through. You, on the other hand —"

"Yes. I was standing up. Off center. So I didn't go." Mark nodded. "I see."

"And now," said the scientist, "the mirror is broken. Our last chance of saving Elaine is gone."

"No!"

"What?" The professor peered up at the other incredulously. "What do you mean, Mark?"

Brown eyes narrowed with excitement, Elaine's sweetheart held out the splinter of glass he had picked up. He shook it in front of the savant's face.

"Professor, every piece of glass that went to make up that mirror is laying over there on the floor."

"I am sorry, my boy." The elder man frowned. "I do not understand."

"Professor, if you break your glasses, all you have to do to get a new pair is to take the pieces to an optician. He'll figure the formula of the lens from the fragments and make you a new set."

"You mean—"

"I mean that we can put the pieces of that mirror together as if it was a jigsaw puzzle. From it, you can figure out some kind of a formula. Then, by experimenting, you can find what kind of energy bolt it takes to blast through the barrier!"

SOMETHING of the man's intensity, his enthusiasm, communicated itself to the professor. His blue eyes came alight.

"It is conceivable!" he declared. "Not likely. But conceivable." He

gripped the fragment of glass which Mark held. "Yes! We shall try it! If it works, we can—"

He stopped short. His face fell.

"We can what?" he finished. "Another time mirror will not help us bring Elaine back—"

His companion interrupted fiercely:

"How do we know? There's always a chance we'll think of something, isn't there? And it's a cinch we won't accomplish anything just sitting here."

"But—"

"The least we can do is try!"

They worked like madmen in the hours that followed, heedless of the wedding guests who came and went from the house in bewildered knots. Unmindful of gashed fingers, Mark fitted the slivers of mirror together, while Professor Duchard tested and analyzed and figured at his side.

And then—

"I have it!" shouted the savant triumphantly. "I have the formula!"

"Then we can construct another mirror?"

Some of the old man's elation dropped away. He shook his head.

"Not yet. We know only the *effect* we want. But how to achieve it—" He shrugged.

Experiments. More experiments. Hours of experiments, with Mark and the professor hovering over an electric crucible bubbling with molten glass.

Hours of failure.

At last the old scientist straightened, his face haggard with weariness.

"It is no use," he said sadly. "I have exhausted my knowledge, and to no avail."

He turned away, shoulders sagging. Stumbled toward the door.

The next instant Mark's voice rose in a scream.

"Look out!"

Instinctively, without so much as a backward glance, the old man lunged forward. Even as he did so, he felt something jerk at his ankle. His leg came out from under him. He pitched to the floor.

Crash!

The crucible was falling, jerked from its place atop the lab bench! The electric cable which supplied its current was twisted about the professor's ankle, somehow unconsciously caught by his foot as he worked.

Molten glass burst out of the pot in a white-hot wave. Slopped over the composition floor in a steaming river. Engulfed table legs and radiator pipes alike.

And then, like a writhing snake, the high tension line from which the crucible cable stemmed was whipping down, torn loose by the jar of the professor's leap!

Down it came! Struck the floor once. Lashed against the glass-engulfed radiator pipes, bare wires flashing.

A ball of purple fire exploded at the contact point, while the cable jerked and twisted like a living thing. The laboratory was suddenly permeated with ozone's peculiar odor.

"Look out!" cried Mark again.

BUT already Professor Duchard had jerked his foot free of the crucible line. He shrank back under the long bench, away from the writhing cable.

An instant later the current went dead. The crackling ball of purple fire evaporated into thin air.

Mark sprang across the room to where the scientist lay. He pulled him to his feet.

"Are you all right, professor? Are you hurt?"

"Yes, yes, my boy. It was a narrow escape, but your warning saved me. I am all right."

The savant leaned against the bench,

trying to still the reflexive trembling of his body. His face was pale. He ran his tongue over lips suddenly gone dry as he stared down at the broken high tension line, and thought of what would have happened had it touched him in its spasm.

And then, suddenly, his blue eyes went wide with stark amazement.

"Mark!" he gasped.

"What's wrong, professor? What is it?"

"That glass on the floor! Look at it!"

The other stared uncomprehendingly.

"The waves, Mark! See the waves!"

A startled exclamation burst from the younger man's lips. He dropped to his knees. Scrutinized the puddle of glass.

But the scientist pulled him erect again.

"My instruments!" he ordered in a voice that trembled. "Quick! I must make tests—"

For half an hour he worked. And when at last he straightened, complete confidence gleamed deep in his eyes.

"Is it—"

Professor Duchard nodded.

"It is. That was the secret, my boy. The secret we sought but could not find. The time mirror is merely a special glass which has been subjected to a terrific electrical discharge, then silvered. That piece on the floor is worthless, of course; too many elements were uncontrolled.

"But knowing the formula as we do; knowing exactly what we are searching for and how to prepare it, I would stake my reputation that we can duplicate the mirror Adrian Vance sent to Elaine."

Mark's eyes were gleaming. His jaw hard.

"Then do it!" he commanded.

"But what good would it do? We cannot bring Elaine back—"

"Maybe not." The other's tanned face was grim. "But we can send me back to where she is."

"Send you back!"

"Yes." A pause. "You see, I've been thinking about the things you've told me, Professor Duchard. About time travel, and how it works.

"You say we can't save Elaine. Well, that's probably true. Maybe she's got to die in France, back in the days before the revolution."

A tremor of emotion passed over him as he said it. He swallowed hard. Then:

"But if she must die, she can at least die easily. Cleanly. Quickly, with a knife through her heart. She doesn't have to go the way Adrian Vance wants her to—tortured by a bunch of drunken scum, then cut to pieces without a chance to fight back."

THERE was pain in the professor's face, too, when he answered.

"I wish it were as easy as that, Mark."

Mark's voice was fierce.

"What's wrong with it? What's to stop me?"

The other sighed. Brushed back white hair with a sweep of one frail hand.

"You cannot change history, my boy," he said sadly. "A study of cosmology would show you that such things are immutable. You can go backward or forward through time and participate in them, but you cannot change them."

"How do you know? Who's traveled through time and then come back to say we can't change events?"

"You do not understand—"

"And I don't care!" the younger man flared. "I may fail—but I'm going to try! I'm not going to sit here, waiting for Elaine to die—"

"But you would have no memory of your life in this century! Remember what Vance said—"

"Right. That's the one thing that might stop me. I'm counting on you to take care of it, though. Is there anything you can do?"

There was a long moment of tension-studded silence. Then:

"Perhaps there is. I have been working on equipment to prevent fighter pilots 'blacking out' during power dives, and I believe there is a relationship between time travel and terrific speeds in space. It is possible that I could insulate you—"

"That's all I need, then. Make me a mirror, professor, and something to insulate me—"

"But you have no focal point! You might go through time to a place a thousand miles and a thousand years from where Elaine is captive—"

Mark laughed harshly.

"Wrong, professor! I've got the most accurate focal point in the world. Or I will have—"

"The most accurate—? What do you mean?" The old man's face was bewildered.

"I'll have the same focal point Elaine had, sir: Gustav Jerbette's painting, 'Elaine Duchard's Escape'." Again that laugh. "I'm going now to steal it from Adrian Vance!"

The house of Adrian Vance was one befitting a professional dealer in antiquities. It set far back from the street, towering against the sky like the black bulk of a medieval castle. A high iron fence surrounded it.

At this moment Mark Carter stood surveying the estate from the shelter of a nearby clump of trees.

"It's like a damned fortress!" he muttered to himself. "He's taking no chances on anyone getting in."

TURNING, then, he gripped a branch of the nearest tree. Swung up into it. Clambered out, cat-like, until he lay beyond the fence and above the grounds of Vance's home.

The limb bowed under his weight as he proceeded until at last he was able to drop lightly to the ground.

One hazard passed!

"And with no worries about that fence being wired for an alarm system, either!" he told himself triumphantly.

He hurried toward the house, thankful for the darkness of the night.

On one side of the big building lay a terrace. French windows opened onto it.

Like a wraith in the night, taking advantage of every shrub and patch of shadow, Mark crept close to the casements.

They were locked.

The trespasser stripped off his coat. Wrapped it around his hand, a bulky, protective wad of cloth covering the flesh. Then, as silently as possible, he pressed on one of the small panes of glass close beside the lock. Harder . . . harder . . . harder . . .

With a faint tinkle of falling glass, the pane gave way.

Tense seconds crawled by on leaden feet. Mark's mouth was dry, his throat cottony. He stood taut, his back to the wall, waiting fearfully for some sign that Vance had been aroused.

At last he relaxed again. Reached through the broken pane and unlocked the big window. Swung it open, ever so gently, and stepped inside, fading swiftly into the thick blackness of the nearest corner.

Once Mark had interviewed a burglar as a feature assignment. He remembered the man's words now.

"Gettin' in ain't the hard part," the second-story worker had explained. "It's gettin' out that's tough. The first thing you gotta do on a job is to line up an exit."

Now, as his eyes grew accustomed

to the blackness, Mark searched for a means of escape. There was a window at the far end of the room. He approached it with swift, silent strides. Opened it wide.

The slightest of creakings caught his ear. Instantly he was on the alert, every muscle tense.

The sound was not repeated. He relaxed.

Where would the picture be?

A large canvas hung above the fireplace. He tiptoed over to it.

The lovely face of the first Elaine Duchard looked down at him!

With trembling fingers he whipped a knife from his pocket. Looked about for a chair to stand on—

"It ain't smart to work a room without fixin' the door first," the burglar had said. "You feel lots better if you know nobody ain't gonna stumble in on you unexpected."

Ten seconds later Mark had wedged a straight-back chair under the knob of the only door leading into the rest of the house.

Turning, he hurried back to the Jerbette painting. With swift, deft slashes he cut it from its frame. Started to roll it up.

"Ah! A visitor!"

THE trespasser whirled as if he had been stabbed. He stumbled from the chair on which he stood. As he did so, the brilliant beam of a five-cell flashlight hit him square in the face like a physical blow. It blinded him. Left him helpless.

"No doubt this is just a social call. Too bad that the police will call it breaking and entering with larcenous intent!"

It was the oily, mocking voice of Adrian Vance, and it came from the French window through which Mark had entered.

"Try to lie out of it!" Vance gloated. "Just try to explain that picture in your hands!"

"I don't have to explain, Vance. You know why I'm here."

The wail of a siren sounded in the distance.

"Oh, of course I know." The other was laughing softly, greasily. "But will the police understand, Carter? That siren you hear—it's coming here, you know; I called the station before I came down to grab you."

Mark's heart jumped like a wounded stag. He looked around wildly. Was this to be the end of it all? Was he to lie in jail while Elaine went to her death, back there in Bourbon France?

His captor was speaking again:

"I didn't dream I could have this much luck! To see that slut Elaine dead—that was the height of my ambition. But now—to have you sent to the penitentiary for burglary—"

The words ended in a roar of laughter. It died, and Vance went on, his tone grim and deadly:

"It's time you dropped that picture, Carter. Drop it—and put your hands up!"

The picture! The one link between 1942 and 1780!

"Drop it!"

Slowly, Mark's hands relaxed. He let the picture fall to the floor.

"Now—raise your hands and walk over to the corner. Stand with your face to the wall!"

Mark moved like one paralyzed. His hands came up as if they were weighted with lead. His brown eyes were fixed on the shadowy finger back of the flashlight, and impotent rage and hatred seethed within them.

Yet what could he do? Jump Vance? Try to wrest the inevitable gun from the antiquarian's hand?

Almost imperceptibly, he shook his

head. No. It was impossible. His slug-riddled body would pitch lifeless to the floor before he could take two steps forward.

Nor was it mere fear of death that made him halt. That he would have faced, and gladly.

But what actually held him back was that such a suicidal attempt would avail him nothing. It would bring him no nearer his real goal than before: Elaine still would meet that awful doom which history had recorded as her fate!

"Turn around, damn you! Get over to the corner! Put your face to the wall!"

Ever so slowly, Mark turned. His brain was pounding with frantic effort as he strove to find some flaw in the awful wall of circumstance that rose about him.

AND then he saw the curtain!

It was just an ordinary curtain, buff-colored and a trifle stiff with starch.

But it hung in front of the window he had opened as an emergency exit when he came in. At the moment, it swayed ever so slightly in the ripple of draft.

Most important of all, that window was set in the wall against which Adrian Vance had directed that he stand. The corner Vance had indicated was a step to the right of where Mark now stood; the window, a step to the left. And a grand piano half-sheltered it from the antiquarian's line of fire!

"Hurry up! Get into that corner!"

Instinctively, the captive tensed to leap.

But the picture! What about it? He must have it! Without that painting, the time mirror Professor Duchard was constructing would be useless!

Then, suddenly, a grim smile played across Mark's lips. There was an angle! There was one wild chance by which he might escape alive and take Jerbette's masterpiece with him!

"Hurry up, or I'll shoot!"

Like a stone from a sling, Mark hurled himself toward the window in a headlong dive. The blackness of the outer night engulfed him.

In the room behind, Vance's Magnum roared a carronade of death. Copper-jacketed slugs splintered the sill at the fleeing man's heels.

Mark landed on one shoulder in a somersaulting roll. The next instant he was on his feet and sprinting for the shadows at the corner of the house.

Flashlight in hand, Vance sprang to the open window.

On Mark ran, and on. Around the house as fast as he could go. Then the smooth plateau of the terrace loomed before him, with its wide-open French window.

He slowed, silenced his pounding footsteps.

On the other side of the big room, still peering out the window through which Mark had hurled himself, stood Vance. His sleek form was silhouetted behind the flashlight's beam.

Like a wraith in the night, the other slipped inside. He crossed the room on tiptoe. His hand darted down to snatch the rolled picture from where it still lay on the floor.

AND then Vance turned. His flashlight caught Mark.

But this time it was the antiquarian who was surprised. He jerked back. Already his adversary was leaping for the cover of a heavy mahogany table. Vance snapped a shot at him. Tried again to place him with the light.

Mark's hand came down on a porcelain vase. He hurled it at Vance with all his might.

Vainly, his enemy tried to dodge. But too late. The vase *thunk'd* home

against his left shoulder. The flashlight fell to the floor.

Like a thunderbolt, Elaine's fiance lunged forward. His left hand slashed down; pinioned the arm that held the Magnum. His right fist came up with express-train speed. Smashed home on the point of Vance's jaw. The antiquarian's body jerked spasmodically. Went limp. Sagged to the floor.

But now the sound of harsh voices and running feet came to Mark's ears.

Clutching the Jerbette painting in one hand, he ducked back out the window. Even in the gloom he could see black figures converging on the house. A sedan stood in the driveway, its spotlight sweeping the house.

"The police!"

Cold sweat stood out on Mark's forehead as he gasped the exclamation. But he did not hesitate. Keeping to the shadows, he headed for the still-open gate through which the car had come.

The iron fence loomed close. He ran along it in a half-crouch.

"Hey, you! Stick 'em up or we shoot!"

For the barest fraction of a second Mark halted in mid-stride. The spotlight was swinging toward him.

But the gate was only a dozen yards away. He made for it in a mad rush. Bullets sang about him. Slugs ricocheted from the iron spikes. But on he went. Lunged through the opening and into the shadowy fastnesses across the street.

The return to Professor Duchard's laboratory was a nightmare of mad dashes and narrow escapes. Squad cars seemed everywhere. Police always on his heels.

And then—

He was slipping through the door, alive and unharmed, with the picture clasped under his arm!

The professor jerked about from the task of hanging a new and bigger time mirror on the easel. It still was shrouded with a heavy cloth.

"It's ready?"

The scientist nodded.

"Yes. I got special co-operation from an old friend who is manager of a glass works." He paused. "And you?"

Mark waved the Jerbette.

"I got the picture," he clipped, "but we're going to have to work fast. The police probably are on their way here now. Vance caught me in the act of stealing the painting." He still was panting from the exertion of his race here.

"Then clip it to this frame quickly!" The professor indicated an arrangement like an oversize drawing board. He hurried to assist the younger man. In a moment their work was done.

There, at last, was "Elaine Duchard's Escape." Mark for the first time studied it carefully.

FOUR people were shown. The central figure was that of the first Elaine Duchard. She was in the act of entering a carriage, her lovely face alive with panic. Beside her a young man—his face in the shadows—held a horse pistol on another man. This second man's features were twisted with hate; Mark thought he never had seen such malevolent eyes.

"Baron Morriere" the professor explained. "The younger man is Jacques Rombeau, Elaine Duchard's lover."

Mark nodded. Turned to scrutinize a third man, unidentifiable, who was clambering to the driver's seat of the coach.

The next instant the laboratory was re-echoing with the sound of heavy blows upon the door.

"Open up!" roared a muffled voice. "It's the law!"

"The police!" Mark's face went pale.

Professor Duchard darted to the bench which lined one wall. Seized a strange-looking helmet which stood there. Rushed with it to Mark.

"The insulator-helmet!" he explained hastily, his blue eyes feverish with excitement. "Strap it on! Quickly!"

"Open up!" the alien voice roared again. "We want in!"

And then the angry accents of Adrian Vance:

"Break it down, officer! Don't let them get away!"

Mark hauled the frame on which the painting was stretched to a position in front of the mirror. Whirled back. Gripped his companion's hand.

"Will it work, professor? Will the mirror take me back through time?"

"That I cannot tell you, my boy. But it should. You know the formula I worked out. You understand the process by which it was constructed." A second's pause. "Actually, I believe it should work far better than the previous time mirror. The one Vance gave Elaine was very old, very crude. This one is the product of modern science, modern workmanship. It creates a tremendously larger rift in the space-time continuum—"

A shot rang out.

At the other end of the laboratory, the outside door burst open, lock shattered. Uniformed police rushed in, Adrian Vance at their head.

"Mark! Quickly! I shall hold them!"

With a savage jerk, Elaine's fiance ripped aside the cloth that veiled the new time mirror. The reflection of Jerbette's painting sprang across its silver surface.

Mark's jaw went hard with tension. He glued his eyes to the figure of Jacques Rombeau, Elaine Duchard's lover.

Behind him, Adrian Vance charged down the laboratory, struggling to shake off the frail, tenacious figure of Professor Duchard. He brought up his heavy Magnum.

But Mark paid him no heed. Already his brain was spinning, his senses reeling. Yet still he concentrated on the lithe, tense figure of Jacques Rombeau holding the fuming Baron Morriere at bay. And through his mind the words kept ringing:

"I shall take over the brain of Jacques Rombeau! I shall save Elaine from her fate!

"I shall change history!"

"YOU dog!" said Baron Morriere in a voice that trembled with passion. "I'll see you drawn and quartered for this! You'll swing from the highest gibbet in all France—"

"Save your breath!" snapped Mark—and then nearly dropped the horse pistol he grasped as the sound of his voice struck his ears. For he spoke in the French of the late eighteenth century, and the voice was not his own, but that of Jacques Rombeau!

From behind him came another voice—faintly tremulous, the voice of a woman:

"Jacques, *mon cher!* We are ready! Quick!"

"Right!"

Then, prodding the baron's stomach with the gun barrel:

"Why I don't kill you now I'll never know. *Le Bon Dieu* knows I've got cause enough. And may He have mercy on your soul if you try to follow us!"

Turning on his heel, Mark sprang aboard the coach. From the driver's seat came a shout and the crack of the whip. With a jerk that nearly threw Mark to the floor, they were off!

"Oh, Jacques! I was so afraid! The baron—"

He turned in his seat. Looked into

the lovely, appealing face of Elaine Duchard. Her arms reached out to him. Instinctively he accepted the embrace. He held her close, and his lips sought hers.

It was strange; incredible. Even as he kissed the girl, Mark realized it. He was two people simultaneously—Mark Carter and Jacques Rombeau. The brain of the former had traveled back through time into the body of the latter. In so doing, it had somehow acquired all the knowledge, the personality, the character traits of Rombeau. Yet because the mind of Mark Carter had been protected by Professor Duchard's insulating helmet, he still was able to think independently - almost as if his own twentieth century being was held apart in a special brain lobe within Jacques Rombeau's skull!

"I knew you would come, Jacques! I knew it!"

A wave of sentiment choked off Mark's reply. Again he kissed the soft hollow of that first Elaine Duchard's throat, trying the while to fight off the awful sense of futility that swept over him as he remembered history's verdict as to her fate.

Then, suddenly, the coach was halting.

"Whoa, there!" came the voice of the burly man on the box. And then: "Well, Jacques, what now? We're away from the castle, but where do we go?"

Mark swung to the ground. Glanced back to where the Chateau Morriere still loomed black and menacing on a distant ridge.

"Every road and bridge is blocked," the other went on. "The peasantry's none too peaceful in these parts, and the baron's taking no chances."

Mark nodded slowly.

"What do you think, Baroc?" he asked. Somehow, he knew that was the man's name.

The burly one scowled.

"Paris, I suppose," he grunted. "If you once get there, and into the slums, the devil himself couldn't rout you out."

"Do you think we can make it?"

"Maybe." A shrug. "We could try the post road."

"All right. Let's go."

THEY jogged on through the night, the coach swaying and bumping over the rough track. Then lights began to sparkle ahead. Baroc pulled up.

"The Golden Cock Inn," he grunted, nodding toward the lights. "Morriere's guards will be there. We'll have to run for it, so be ready for rough going."

The next instant they were rolling again. Closer the lights came, and closer. Now they were almost abreast them . . .

"Halt!"

A man was running toward them, waving his arms.

Baroc shattered the night with a fearful oath. His long whip cracked over the backs of the double-span of greys ahead. The horses leaped forward.

They were past the inn, driving hell-bent through the pitch-blackness of the countryside. But behind them was a tumult of shouts, a wild disorder.

Mark shot a glance through the window. Caught a glimpse of running figures.

"Jacques! Are they after us?" There was panic in Elaine's voice.

A clatter of hooves answered her before Mark could open his mouth. The girl clung to him, her face chalky with fear.

"If the baron catches me again, Jacques—"

"He won't catch you! I promise it, Elaine! He won't!"

But the words of Adrian Vance leaped into his brain like red-hot branding irons:

Elaine Duchard was tortured and murdered by Baron Morriere's retainers!

Were these men the ones history had marked to do the awful deed?

The thunder of hooves was almost upon them now. The coach rocked from side to side. Bounced wildly from one rut to another.

A hoarse bellow from Baroc:

"They're coming, Jacques!"

Then out of the night like the wind itself the riders came. Big men, with fierce eyes and savage, brutal faces. Men cut from the same pattern as their master, Baron Morriere.

"Halt!"

"To hell with you!"

A rider surged ahead. He cut in toward the coach's horses.

"Oh, no, you don't!"

BAROC'S whip lashed out. Bit into the face of the horseman. Laid the flesh bare from eye to jaw. The man gave a shriek of agony. Pitched from his saddle into the road. The coach leaped high as it struck his falling body.

But the others closed in. One sprang from his horse to a precarious perch on the mounting-board. His bearded face leered in. A knife flashed.

Boom!

The man fell back, dead before he hit the ground, his throat torn out by the slug from Mark's horse pistol. The coach was blue with the acrid stench of gunpowder smoke.

"Oh, Jacques! Don't let them get me! I love you so, Jacques—no matter what happens—"

Mark's arm was tight around Elaine. His face was taut and grim as they bounced onward. He fingered the haft of a broad-bladed knife in his belt.

"They won't get you! I promise it—"

Then, suddenly, their enemies were rushing to the attack again. From all sides they came. The point of a sword cut off Baroc's hoarse cry in midbreath. He pitched from the box.

On through the night plunged the driverless coach, the horses mad with fright. A bridge loomed ahead. They raced for it like creatures from hell, flanks lathered, nostrils flaring.

Another rider tried to spring to the coach. Mark's knife flashed out. Drove home.

Then they were onto the bridge.

With a roar the coach jumped sidewise on the boards. Crashed into the flimsy railing. Tottered for a moment above the stream. Plunged backward into the water, dragging the horses with it.

Mark felt himself hurled back into one corner. His head smashed hard against something. Consciousness waned.

But the rush of water revived him. He lurched half-erect as the river spilled through the windows in a tidal wave.

Elaine lay unconscious on the floor. He caught up her limp body. Kicked open one door. Lunged out into the turbulent stream. Drifted with the current, barely keeping their heads above water.

From the banks came the shouts of searching men.

Onward Mark and Elaine drifted. The girl's eyes still were closed. Her body slack.

All his life those endless hours were a nightmare to the man. He remembered, vaguely, that they lay hidden under the roots of a willow while guardsmen on the bank above them

cursed the luck that had let the pair escape. Mark's teeth were chattering and his muscles weak. Elaine's face, beside him, was growing blue with cold. Yet still she did not recover consciousness.

Then, at last, the baron's men were clumping off, and Mark was dragging his sweetheart out onto the bank.

A voice said:

"Praise God they did not find you!"

MARK staggered to face the man who spoke. His hand flashed to the knife in his belt.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The stranger was old. The hands he raised in a gesture of peace were toil-worn.

"Only a poor peasant, friend," he answered. "I welcome you because the baron's men would not be hunting you were you not his enemies—may his soul rot in hell!"

"You will help us?"

The old man nodded.

"As much as I can. There is an abandoned chateau near here. You can hide there. I shall bring you food."

All but one wing of the ancient edifice to which the peasant took them was in ruins, gutted by fire. It stood high on a hill like a blackened skeleton.

"Once those who lived here were as cruel and proud as Baron Morriere," commented their guide. "Fire made them our equals."

And the part of Mark that was Jacques Rombeau answered:

"Fire will make many equals in the years to come, old man. And swords will help, for a poor man's arm can strike as lusty a blow as any lord's."

They laid Elaine on a bed of straw high in the unburned wing. She was conscious now, but screaming in delirium.

"We've got to get a doctor!" Mark grated tensely. "If she dies—"

The thought brought him up short. History said Elaine Duchard could not die! No! She must be tormented and murdered! And already the time was short, for Professor Duchard had asserted that she was killed two days after her first escape. Twelve hours had passed since he and the girl had clambered into the coach. That left thirty-six—

The old peasant was shaking his head.

"There is no doctor here who can be trusted," he declared. "One and all, they would run to Baron Morriere. The nearest who would help you and keep his mouth shut is in Paris—"

For ten long seconds Mark struggled with himself.

Elaine was sick. Perhaps dying. Well, why not let her die? Wouldn't it be better than to see her perhaps back in the hands of Baron Morriere? Was it not to kill her that he, Mark Carter, had come across a hundred fifty years of time? Had he not sworn he would contradict history's verdict—"

"Jacques! Don't let them get me! Save me! Jacques—"

She was screaming in delirium again, her lovely face pale, her golden hair water-soaked to limp stringiness. Mark knelt beside her. Chafed her wrists. Sponged the fevered brow.

"Jacques! Jacques!"

"History be damned!"

He shouted it aloud. Sprang erect, eyes flashing cold fire.

"I won't let her die now, and I won't let the baron get her! History or no history, she's my Elaine, and I'll save her!"

HE WHIRLED on the bewildered peasant.

"How far is it to Paris?"

"About eleven miles."

"Then I'll go there. I'll get a doctor." Even as he spoke, Mark was pulling on his jacket. He strode toward the door, then hesitated and came back. He gripped the old peasant's shoulders. "Stay with her, old man, 'till I come back."

"I shall stay."

Mark drew the knife from his belt. Handed it to the other. When he spoke, his voice was but a cracked whisper:

"If *they* come . . . use this. She would rather have it so."

And the answer came back:

"I promise it, friend! They shall not take her alive!"

A wild trip it was, that journey to Paris. A dozen times before he was beyond Baron Morriere's domains, Mark was certain he would be trapped.

Then he was in the city and searching out the doctor's office in a vast, ancient rookery on the Left Bank. Outside—although it was only mid-afternoon—hovering storm clouds transformed day into night, while, at last, he pounded on the door to which he had been directed.

The door opened. A scowling, youthful man with tousled hair glared out at him, reeling tipsily all the while.

"Wha' y' want?"

"I'm looking for Doctor d'Allempier."

"Then why y' come here? *I* ain' no doc-tor. Me, I'm painter. Gustav Jerbette. 'M bes' dam' pain'er—"

Disgust welled within Mark's heart like the thunder that rumbled overhead. He jerked free of the drunk's pawings.

And then, suddenly, he stopped. Stopped coldly and completely, as if he had been turned to stone. Deep within him an idea was growing. An idea so stupendous that it made his brain reel within his skull.

He whirled on the drunk.

"What did you say your name was?"

"'M Gustav Jerbette. 'M pain'er. Bes' dam' pain'er—"

The next instant the tipsy one was reeling backward into his room under the impetus of a powerful shove.

"Hey! Wha's idea?" he burbled. "Qui' pushin'—"

"Shut up, you stew-bum! I'm going to sober you up if I have to kill you! You've got a job to do!"

* * * *

THE doctor was a grave, bearded man. At last he rose from beside Elaine's straw bed in the fire-gutted chateau.

"How is she, doctor? Is there any hope?" Mark's voice was choked with emotion, his face drawn and haggard with strain.

Slowly, the medical man shook his head.

"I am sorry, *m'sieur,*" he said quietly. "I can offer you little solace. Her lungs already are filling. I doubt that she can last until morning."

The other was breathing hard. His eyes were like fiery gimlets.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" he begged, half-sobbing. "Can't you at least give her something so she'll recover consciousness? I must talk to her—"

"That I can do."

The physician turned back to the bed. Raised the dying girl's head from the pallet to administer doses of several medicines.

"I have done all I can," he said. "From here it is in the hands of *Le Bon Dieu.*"

Dazedly, Mark thanked him. Paid him with coins from Jacques Rombeau's wallet.

The door to the room beyond opened on sagging hinges and Gustav Jerbette stepped out. His eyes still were red-rimmed from drink, but otherwise he appeared sober.

"It's done," he said in a disgusted tone. "Lord knows it looks like nothing in this world or the next, but it's done."

Again Mark dealt out coins.

The old peasant entered the room.

"The baron is furious," he reported grimly. "They are searching every hut and hovel—"

The doctor shifted his feet nervously.

"Since there is nothing more I can do—" he murmured.

Mark seemed to shake off the strange, dream-like lassitude that gripped him.

"Of course, gentlemen. All of you have done your best. But there isn't any need of your staying longer, imperiling your lives by the chances of Baron Morriere's vengeance. Please leave—and my thanks go with you."

Out they marched, a weird procession: painter, doctor, peasant. Only the old man hesitated at the door.

"God be with you, friend!" he whispered, and pulled the heavy portal shut behind him.

Like a man in a trance, Mark watched them go. His feet were spread apart; fists clenched. Nor did the Sphinx at Giza look out upon the world with a face more grey or stony or implacable than was his.

"History!" he cried aloud, and his voice was half-hysterical. "Damn history! I'll beat it yet! Those devils shan't have Elaine—"

"Jacques!"

It was Elaine. Wanly she looked up from the pallet where she lay. Tried to force a smile.

Mark dropped to his knees beside her.

"Elaine! My darling!"

The girl raised a hand that trembled. Caressed his forehead.

"Poor Jacques!" she whispered. "He looks so worried; so frightened—"

"And good cause he has, too!"

MARK whirled, every muscle taut, at that harsh voice.

There, in the doorway, backed by his guardsmen, stood the Baron Morriere!

Tension hung over the silence of the room like smoke above a battlefield.

"Did you think you'd get away, you fool?" the noble gloated. "Did you think you'd escape Raoul Morriere's vengeance?"

Mark was breathing hard. His face was pale, his eyes over-bright. Deep within his brain words were pounding, with the beat of a giant sledge . . .

"I shall defeat fate!" those words throbbed. *"I shall rewrite history! Not as I wanted to. No. But they shall not have Elaine—"*

His hand clashed down, then, as a cobra strikes. Down to the broad bladed knife Jacques Rombeau carried in his belt. All his mind, all his heart, was concentrated on this one thing: Even though lightning should strike him this very instant, he would seize that knife. Whip it out. Bury it to the hilt in Elaine's breast, that death—not Baron Morriere's retainers—might claim her!

But his hand clutched empty air. He stared down in shocked incredulity. Stared down, and remembered—

He had given that knife to the old peasant before he went to Paris! And he had failed to ask it back!

"Look! He reaches for his knife!" whooped the baron. "He would protect his sweetheart!"

The guardsmen behind him joined in his roar of laughter.

Something came over Mark Carter in that moment. Something at once cold and deadly, and hotly, fiercely passionate. He felt a kinship to all earth's fighting madmen—the Malay, run amok; the Viking, gone berserk; the Arab, charging through hell to paradise.

Like a human projectile he launched himself, straight for the throat of Baron Morriere!

"Ai!"

It was not a word, that sound that came from the noble's throat. No. There was something more primitive than that about it.

It was terror, incarnate.

Before the man could move, Mark's fingers were clutching at him, tearing his clothing and his flesh. Again he screamed.

As one possessed, Mark jerked him from the bosom of his guardsmen. Hurled him bodily across the room, to slam against the farthest wall with a crash that echoed through the ancient wing.

But now the guardmen's paralysis was broken. They surged forward as one man.

"Jacques! Look out!"

ELAINE'S scream lent strength to her lover's arms. He slammed the door in the face of the oncoming fighters. Half a dozen swords stabbed deep into its wood, so closely were they upon him. He hurled himself at the portal. Forced it shut by sheer desperation. Slammed home its triple bolts.

He turned, then, his breath coming in great, sobbing gasps.

Baron Morriere had lurched to his feet. His right hand gripped a sword, his left a dagger.

"You'll die yet, you dog!" he snarled. I'll spit you on my sword like a pig above a bed of coals!"

The flames of the pit showed in Mark's eyes.

"And I'll see *you* in hell" he grated.

With a curse of contempt, the baron charged.

Mark sprang aside.

Again the other rushed to the attack.

Once more Mark dodged. But now desperation gleamed in his eyes. He was unarmed, helpless. One slip, one misstep, and that cruel blade would pin him to the wall!

Another rush. Another escape. But this time the blade had come close. Mark's shirt was ripped; his shoulder bleeding from a long scratch.

Even worse: from the end of the room came the sound of splintering wood as the guardsmen smashed in the panels of the door. A moment more and they would be upon him!

Again the deadly play of wits. And then, suddenly, Mark found himself penned in a corner. Trapped. The baron faced him, panting, his face alight with evil joy. And beyond the noble, on her bed of straw, Elaine Duchard stared at her lover with horror-straught eyes.

"Die, you dog!"

The baron lunged. His gleaming sword stabbed for Mark's vitals. The unarmed man's teeth clenched to the take the fatal blow.

It never came!

One moment the baron was charging. The next, falling.

"Elaine!"

For the girl's white body was sprawled across the floor. Her thin hands still clutched the baron's ankle.

The next instant her lover was at the noble's throat. His fists beat a tattoo of mayhem on the other's face. Forced him back against a window-sill. Beat him to a senseless, bleeding pulp.

"Jacques!"

He whirled. Saw the door at the far end of the room buckle and give way.

With one sweep of his arms, he sent the baron's body toppling through the window. Falling down . . . down . . . down, to death on the stone-slab walk three stories below.

Even as he did it, Mark was leaping toward Elaine. He caught her in his arms and lunged for the room's second door. He made it bare inches ahead of the guardsmen's swords.

This door was lighter. Already it rattled under the blows of the baron's men.

"Let me die, Jacques!" Elaine whispered. "I know I am going. You need not try to save me."

"Don't say it!" Mark's voice was a jagged knife of command. "You can't die now. Don't say it!"

HE CARRIED her, then, to where the picture Gustav Jerbette had painted stood. A strange picture, for that day and age, for it portrayed Mark Carter and his fiancee, Elaine Duchard, standing side by side in front of a building clearly identifiable as Professor Duchard's laboratory. And the pair were dressed, not in the garb of eighteenth century France, but in that of twentieth century America.

"Shut your eyes, Elaine!"

Wearily, the dying girl obeyed.

With one savage jerk, Mark whipped the cover from another stand. A stand on which stood a mirror. A mirror whose surface seemed to ripple in the fading light. A circular mirror, full three feet in diameter. A mirror with a garishly ornate frame.

His hands trembling with feverish haste, Mark adjusted the picture to reflect in the glass.

Already the door was cracking.

He snatched Elaine from where she lay. Held her half-conscious body before the mirror.

"Open your eyes, Elaine! Open your eyes and look at that girl in the mirror! Concentrate on her, Elaine! *Concentrate!*"

His own eyes were fixed on the image of his twentieth century self that Gustav Jerbette had painted. His brain ached with the force of will he was exerting. He felt himself falling through endless miles of space. Falling . . . falling . . . falling . . .

"Thank God!" exclaimed Professor Duchard fervently. "You both are safe!"

Dazedly, Mark and Elaine looked at each other across the narrow aisle separating their white hospital beds. Across the room, sunlight streamed in an open window, its rays glistening on the snowy linen of a third but empty bed.

"What happened?" Mark queried in a bewildered tone. "I was in your laboratory, professor, and Vance rushed in—"

"You went through the time mirror, my boy. Back to eighteenth century France. And Vance went with you. Apparently he came too close to the glass in his eagerness to stop you; his eyes must have focussed on one of the other figures from Jerbette's picture, reflected in the gap through the space-time barrier. He fell in a coma at the same instant you did."

"But I don't remember anything!" Mark protested. "I was going to go back through time to save Elaine, even if I had to change history to do it. Then Vance came in, and everything went blank—"

"Yes," broke in Elaine. "The same thing happened to me. I was sitting in front of the mirror Adrian gave me. Then I saw my ancestor from the painting, and I seemed to be falling—"

Professor Duchard nodded.

"Of course. Time travel apparently brings with it complete loss of memory—"

"But I was insulated against amnesia!" exclaimed Mark.

"Only on the trip back, my boy. Not on your return. No doubt you remem-

bered the twentieth century while in the eighteenth. But your return destroyed your memories of Bourbon France."

THE younger man scowled.

"It doesn't make sense," he grunted. "I'm beginning to think the whole business is so much imagination. After all, how could I transport Elaine back from 1780 to 1942? Or myself, for that matter—"

"Perhaps I have some information which will throw light on the subject," the white-haired scientist interrupted. "Yesterday my old friend, Strong, the historian, was passing through the city. He came here to see me.

"He told me he had run across Gustav Jerbette's unpublished memoirs in the course of his researches. And Jerbette, in describing how he came to paint 'Elaine Duchard's Escape,' says the figure in the time mirror on which you concentrated—the man with the horse pistol—was the first Elaine Duchard's lover, Jacques Rombeau.

"Jerbette says Rombeau came to him with a strange assignment. First he took him to the largest glass works in Paris and made him wait while the craftsmen manufactured a special mirror to his order. Then Rombeau led the way to an abandoned chateau a few miles out of Paris. Elaine Duchard lay hidden on the top floor, desperately ill.

"Jerbette's job was to paint a picture of the girl and a strange man, as described to him by Rombeau. Both wore clothes of a different type than any then known, and were in strange surroundings. The job done, Rombeau dismissed the painter. Later, Jerbette says he heard that the two lovers were surprised and murdered by Baron Morriere and his men, although the baron himself was killed in the fight.

"All this so intrigued Jerbette that he promptly painted his famous 'Elaine Duchard's Escape,' showing the lovers getting away from the baron's chateau."

Mark frowned. Shook his head.

"I see how you think it ties in, Professor," he admitted, "but there are too many loopholes."

The savant smiled.

"Yes, there are loopholes," he agreed, "but I do not think there are too many.

"The strange portrait Jerbette painted unfortunately never turned up again. It, of course, would be final proof. For if we found a picture of you—Mark Carter—and Elaine, in a twentieth century scene and wearing modern clothes, yet painted by Gustav Jerbette, there could be no doubt that your brain—cloaked in Jacques Rombeau's body—did the job.

"However, Jerbette does leave a very accurate description of the mirror Rombeau had made. And there is no doubt in my mind that it is the same one Vance gave to Elaine."

"But it's impossible!" Mark protested. "I couldn't have made a time mirror with the primitive equipment of that era—"

"I believe you could. Our work in discovering the formula for the one I made gave you a sufficient understanding of the device's fundamentals to construct a crude model."

"But a terrific bolt of electricity was required, professor. And there was no electrical equipment in those days. It's a complete anachronism."

"YOU think so?" The old scientist smiled. "Well, I do not wonder. You convinced Jerbette that Jacques Rombeau was stark, raving mad."

"You mean—"

"What other conclusion could any sane mortal draw from the actions of a

man who insisted on defying God and the elements by exposing great circular trays of molten glass on top of the highest tower in all Paris during the worst electrical storm in years, until finally one of them was struck by lightning?"

Mark stared open-mouthed. Again he and the bewildered Elaine exchanged glances. And instinctively their hands reached out across the aisle, to join in love's tender clasp. The happiness of utter confidence and peace glowed in their eyes.

Then, still holding the girl's hand, Mark turned back to the professor. His brows knitted with incredulity.

"My God!" he exclaimed half to himself. "Could it be possible? Could I have done such a thing?"

Abruptly, he halted.

"No!" he clipped decisively. "There are other angles to be considered. Vance, for instance. You say he went with me through the time mirror—"

"Yes." The savant nodded slowly. "That, Mark, is the final proof. The evidence beyond contradiction. The thing that convinces me—"

"Proof? Evidence? I don't get it."

"You will recall, Mark, that Jerbette's memoirs said Baron Morriere was killed in that final battle with Jacques Rombeau?"

"Yes. Of course. What's that got to do with it?"

The scientist leveled a trembling finger at the window across the room, through which the sunlight still streamed. Never had he been more impressive. Solemn conviction gleamed in his blue eyes.

"Not five minutes before you and Elaine aroused from your state of suspended animation," he said, "Adrian Vance—still in a coma—sprang from his bed to that window and hurled himself to his death!"

Horror widened the two young people's eyes. Elaine's face was pale.

But understanding now was flooding through Mark. He nodded slowly.

"You can't change history!" he said.

THE END

WAS THE MOON PART OF EARTH?

By WILLIS WHITE

WHETHER or not the moon was ever joined to earth has been a subject of controversy for scientists for hundreds of years. It has never been fully answered.

Recently, Dr. Earl W. Rufus, of the astronomy department at the University of Michigan, gave his theory to prove the two were joined. His theory is based on the discovery of many small, glassy objects called tektites, along the southwestern shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Scientists have tried to determine the origin of these tektites without success, but Dr. Rufus maintains that they are particles formed when the moon was violently torn away from the earth.

Sir George Darwin first propounded this "fission" theory of the moon's formation which states that a powerful tidal force tore the moon from the earth in its semi-molten stage and the point of rupture formed the depression that is now the Pecific Ocean.

Naturally when the moon was torn away there must have been many small particles carried into space with it which revolved for a time until some floated back to earth and some drifted out into space. Dr. Rufus says that those particles which floated back to the earth are the tektites which are found in the Pacific area.

These glassy particles are believed to have been formed from the inner layers of the earth which also is in keeping with various theories concerning the structure of the earth at the time of the moon's fission.

Further evidence in support of Dr. Rufus' theory is to be found in the series of trenches on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean near the region where the tektites are found. These trenches are thought to have been formed when the millions of particles of tektites were torn from the glossy interior of the earth at the time of the fission.

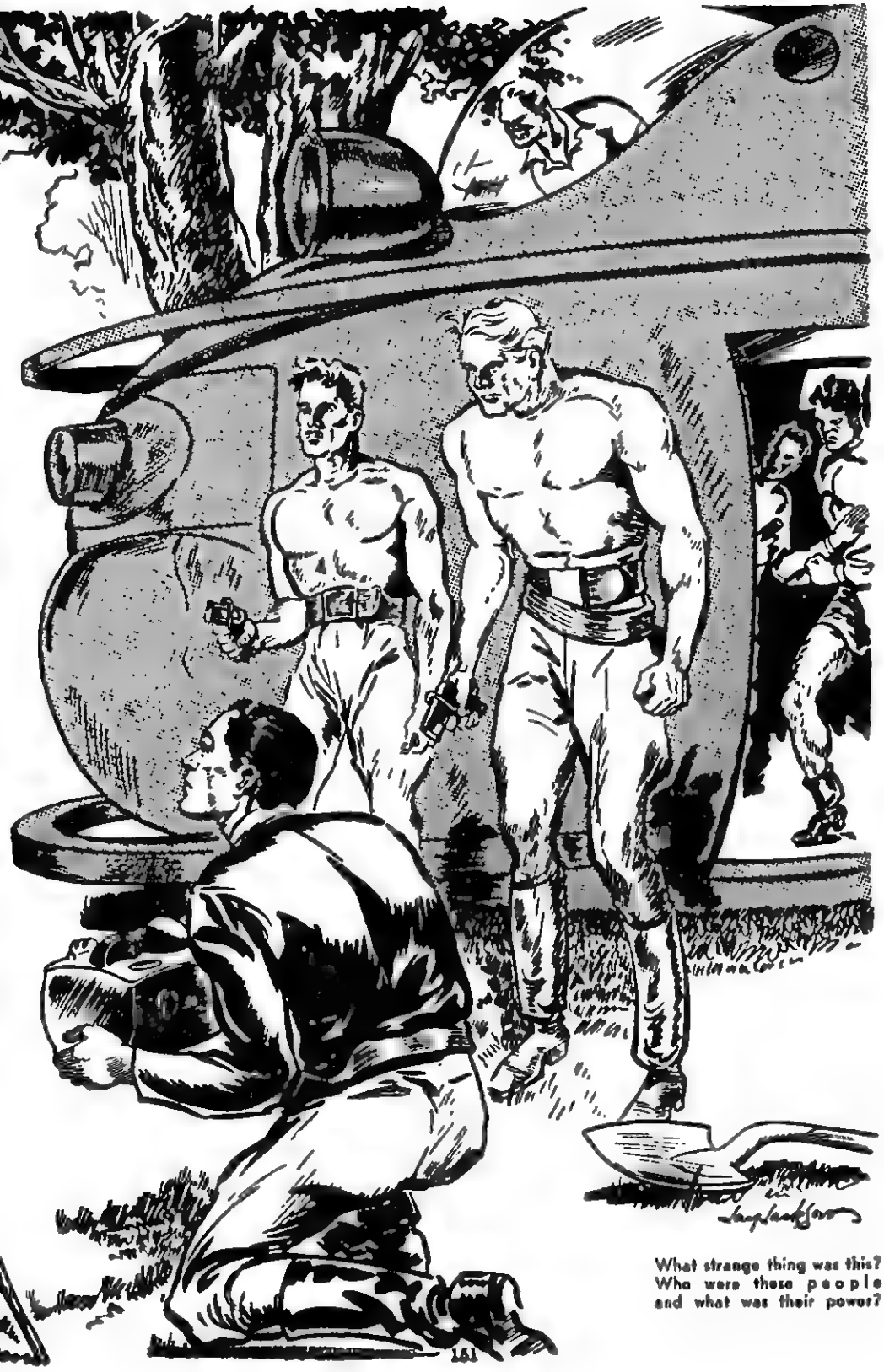
Planet OF THE GODS

by Robert Moore Williams

Two planets circling Vega! But a more amazing discovery waited the explorers when they landed!

"WHAT do you make of it?" Commander Jed Hargraves asked huskily.

Ron Val, busy at the telescope, was too excited to look up from the eye-piece. "There are at least two planets circling Vega!" he said quickly. "There may be other planets farther out, but I can see two plainly. And Jed, the nearest planet, the one we are approaching, has an atmosphere. The telescope reveals a blur that could only be caused by an atmosphere. And—Jed, this may seem so impossible you won't believe it—but I can see several large spots on the surface that are almost certainly lakes.



What strange thing was this? Who were these people and what was their power?

They are not big enough to be called oceans or seas. But I am almost positive they are lakes!"

According to the preconceptions of astronomers, formed before they had a chance to go see for themselves, solar systems were supposed to be rare birds. Not every sun had a chance to give birth to planets. Not one sun in a thousand, maybe not one in a million; maybe, with the exception of Sol, not another one in the whole universe.

And here the first sun approached by the Third Interstellar Expedition was circled by planets!

The sight was enough to drive an astronomer insane.

Ron Val tore his eyes away from the telescope long enough to stare at Captain Hargraves. "Air and water on this planet!" he gasped. "Jed, do you realize what this may mean?"

Jed Hargraves grinned. His face was lean and brown, and the grin, spreading over it, relaxed a little from the tension that had been present for months.

"Easy, old man," he said, clapping Ron Val on the shoulder. "There is nothing to get so excited about."

"But a solar system—"

"We came from one."

"I know we did. But just the same, finding another will put our names in all the books on astronomy. They aren't the commonest things in the universe, you know. And to find one of the planets of this new system with air and water—Jed, where there is air and water there may be life!"

"There probably is. Life, in some form, seems to be everywhere. Remember we found spores being kicked around by light waves in the deepest depths of space. And Pluto, in our own system, has mosses and lichens that the biologists insist are alive. It won't be surprising if we find life out there." He gestured through the port at the world swimming through space toward them.

"I mean intelligent life," Ron Val corrected.

"Don't bet on it. The old boys had the idea they would find intelligent life on Mars, until they got there. Then they discovered that intelligent creatures had once lived on the Red Planet. Cities, canals, and stuff. But the people who had built the cities and canals had died of starvation long before humans got to Mars. So it isn't a good bet that we shall find intelligence here."

THE astronomer's face drooped a little. But not for long. "That was true of Mars," he said. "But it isn't necessarily true here. And even if Mars was dead, Venus wasn't. Nor is Earth. If there is life on two of the planets of our own solar system, there may be life on one of the planets of Vega. Why not?" he challenged.

"Hey, wait a minute," Hargraves answered. "I'm not trying to start an argument."

"Why not?"

"If you mean why not an argument—"

"I mean, why not life here?"

"I don't know why not," Hargraves shrugged. "For that matter, I don't know *why*, either." He looked closely at Ron Val. "You ape! I believe you're hoping we will find life here."

"Of course that's what I'm hoping," Ron Val answered quickly. "It would mean a lot to find people here. We could exchange experiences, learn a lot. I know it's probably too much to hope for." He broke off. "Jed, are we going to land here?"

"Certainly we're going to land here!" Jed Hargraves said emphatically. "Why in the hell do you think we've crossed thirty light years if we don't land on a world when we find one? This is an exploring expedition—"

Hargraves saw that he had no listener. Ron Val had listened only long enough to learn what he wanted to know, then had dived back to his beloved telescope to watch the world spiraling up through space toward them. That world meant a lot to Ron Val, the thrill of discovery, of exploring where a human foot had never trod in all the history of the universe.

New lands in the sky! The Third Interstellar Expedition—third because two others were winging out across space, one toward Sirius, the other toward Cygnus—was approaching land! The fact also meant something to Jed Hargraves, possibly a little less than it did to Ron Val because Hargraves had more responsibilities. He was captain of the ship, commander of the expedition. It was his duty to take the ship to Vega, and to bring it safely home.

Half of his task was done. Vega was bright in the sky ahead and the tough bubble of steel and quartz that was the ship was dropping down to rest on one of Vega's planets. Hargraves started to leave the nook that housed Ron Val and his telescope.

The ship's loudspeaker system shouted with sudden sound.

"Jed! Jed Hargraves! Come to the bridge at once."

That was Red Nielson's voice. He was speaking from the control room in the nose of the ship. Nielson sounded excited.

Hargraves pushed a button under the loud-speaker. The system was two-way, allowing for intercommunication.

"Hargraves speaking. What's wrong?"

"A ship is approaching. It is coming straight toward us."

"A ship! Are you out of your head? This is Vega."

"I don't give a damn if it's Brooklyn! I know a space ship when I see one. And this is one. Either get up here and take command or tell me what you want done."

Discipline among the personnel of this expedition was so nearly perfect there was no need for it. Consequently there was none. Before leaving earth, skilled mental analysts had aided in the selection of this crew, and had welded it together so artfully that it thought, acted, and functioned as a unit. Jed Hargraves was captain, but he had never heard the word spoken, and never wanted to hear it. No one had ever put "sir" after his name. Nor had anyone ever questioned an order, after it was given. Violent argument there might be, before an order was given, with Hargraves filtering the pros and cons through his rigidly logical mind, but the instant he reached a decision the argument stopped. He was one of the crew, and the crew knew it. The crew was one with him, and he knew it.

He might question Nielson's facts, once, in surprise. But not twice. If Nielson said a ship was approaching, a ship *was* approaching.

"I'M COMING," Hargraves rapped into the mike. "Turn full power into the defense screen. Warn the engine room to be ready for an emergency. Sound the call to stations. And Red, hold us away from this planet."

Almost before he had finished speaking, a siren was wailing through the ship. Although he had used the microphone in the nook that housed the telescope, Ron Val had been so interested in the world they were approaching that he had not heard the captain's orders. He heard the siren.

"What is it, Jed?"

Hargraves didn't have time to explain. He was diving out the door and racing toward the bridge in the nose of the ship. "Come on," he flung back

over his shoulder at Ron Val. "Your post is at the fore negatron."

Ron Val took one despairing glance at his telescope, then followed the commander.

As he ran toward the control room, Hargraves heard the ship begin to radiate a new tempo of sound. The siren was dying into silence, its warning task finished. Other sounds were taking its place. From the engine room in the stern was coming a spiteful hiss, like steam escaping under great pressure from a tiny vent valve. That was the twin atomics, loading up, building up the inconceivable pressures they would feed to the Kruchek drivers. A slight rumble went through the ship, a rumble seemingly radiated from every molecule, from every atom, in the vessel. It *was* radiated from every molecule! That rumble came from the Kruchek drivers warping the ship in response to the controls on the bridge. Bill Kruchek's going-faster-than-hell engines, engineers called them. A fellow by the name of Bill Kruchek had invented them. When Bill Krucheck's going-faster-than-hell drivers dug their toes into the lattice of space and put brawny shoulders behind every molecule within the field they generated, a ship within that field went faster than light. The Kruchek drivers, given the juice they needed in such tremendous quantities, took you from hell to yonder in a mighty hurry. They had been idling, drifting the ship slowly in toward the planet. Now, in response to an impulse from Nielson on the bridge, they grumbled, and hunching mighty shoulders for the load, prepared to hurl the ship away from the planet. Hargraves could feel the vessel surge in response to the speed. Then there was a distant thud, and he could feel the surge no longer. The anti-accelerators had been cut in, neutralizing the effect of inertia.

Shoving open a heavy door, Hargraves was in the control room. A glance showed him Nielson on the bridge. Leaning over, his fingers on the bank of buttons that controlled the ship, he was peering through the heavy quartzite observation port at something approaching from the right. Beside him, on his right, a man was standing ready at the radio panel. And to the left of the bridge two men had already jerked the covers from the negatron and were standing ready beside it.

RON VAL leaped past Hargraves, dived for a seat on the negatron. That was his post. He had been chosen for it because of his familiarity with optical instruments. Along the top of the negatron was a sighting telescope. Ron Val looked once to see where the man on the bridge was looking, then his fingers flew to the adjusting levers of the telescope. The negatron swung around to the right, centered on something there.

"Ready," Ron Val said, not taking his eyes from the 'scope.

"Hold your fire," Hargraves ordered.

He was on the bridge, standing beside Red Nielson. Off to the right he could see the enemy ship. Odd that he should think of it as an enemy. It wasn't. It was merely a strange ship. But there were relics in his mind, vague racial memories, of the days when stranger and enemy were synonymous. The times when this was true were gone forever, but the thoughts remained.

"Shall we run for it?" Nielson questioned, his hands on the controls that would turn full power into the drivers.

"No. If we run, they will think we have some reason for running. That might be all they would need to conclude we are up to no good. Is the defense screen on full power?"

"Yes." Nielson pushed the lever

again to be sure. "I'm giving it all it will take."

Hargraves could barely see the screen out there a half mile from the ship. It was twinkling dimly as it swept up cosmic dust.*

The oncoming ship had been a dot in the sky. Now it was a round ball.

"Try them on the radio," Hargraves said. "They probably won't understand us but at least they will know we're trying to communicate with them."

There was a swirl of action at the radio panel.

"No answer," the radio operator said.

"Keep trying."

"Look!" Nielson shouted. "They've changed course. They're c o m i n g straight toward us."

The ball had bobbled in its smooth flight. As though caught in the attraction of a magnet it was coming straight toward them.

For an instant, Hargraves stared. Should he run or should he wait? He didn't want to run and he didn't want to fight. On the other hand, he did not want to take chances with the safety of the men under his command.

His mission was peaceful. Entirely so. But the ball was driving straight toward them. How big it was he could not estimate. It wasn't very big. Oddly, it presented a completely blank surface. No ports. And, so far as he could tell, there was no discharge from driving engines. The latter meant nothing. Their own ship showed no discharge from the Kruchek drivers. But no ports—

It came so fast he couldn't see it come. The flash of light! It came from the ball. For the fractional part of a second, the defense screen twinkled where the flash of light hit it. But—the defense screen was not designed to turn light or any other form of radiation. The light came through. It wasn't light. It carried a component of visible radiation but it wasn't light. The beam struck the earth ship.

Clang!

FROM the stern came a sudden scream of tortured metal. The ship rocked, careened, tried to spin on its axis. On the control panels, a dozen red lights flashed, winked off, winked on again. Heavy thuds echoed through the vessel. Emergency compartments closing.

Hargraves hesitated no longer.

"Full speed ahead!" he shouted at Red Nielson.

"Ron Val. Fire!"

This was an attack. This was a savage, vicious attack, delivered without warning, with no attempt to parley. The ship had been hit. How badly it had been damaged he did not know. But unless the damage was too heavy they could outrun this ball, flash away from it faster than light, disappear in the sky, vanish. The ship had legs to run. There was no limit to her speed. She could go fast, then she could go faster.

"Full speed—"

Nielson looked up from the bank of buttons. His face was ashen. "She doesn't respond, Jed. The drivers are off. The engine room is knocked out."

There was no rumble from Bill Kruchek's going-faster-than-hell engines. The hiss of the atomics was still faintly audible. Short of annihilation, nothing could knock them out. Energy was being generated but it wasn't getting to the drive. Leaping to the controls, Hargraves tried them himself.

* Originally devised as a protection against meteors, it was a field of force that would disintegrate any solid particle that struck it, always presuming it did not tangle with an asteroid or a meteor too big for it to handle. A blood brother of the negatron, it made space flight, if not a first-class insurance risk, at least fairly safe.—Ed.

They didn't respond.

"Engine room!" he shouted into the communication system.

There was no answer.

The ship began to yaw, to drop away toward the planet below them. The planet was far distant as yet, but the grasping fingers of its gravity were reaching toward the vessel, pulling it down.

Voices shouted within the ship.

"Jed!"

"What happened?

"Jed, we're falling!

"That ball, Jed—"

Voices calling to Jed Hargraves, asking him what to do. He couldn't answer. There was no answer. There was only —the ball! It was the answer.

Through the observation port, he could see the circular ship. It was getting ready to attack again. The sphere was moving leisurely toward its already crippled prey, getting ready to deliver the final stroke. It would answer all questions of this crew, answer them unmistakably. It leered at them.

Wham!

The ship vibrated to a sudden gust of sound. Something lashed out from the vessel. Hargraves did not see it go because it, too, went faster than the eye could follow. But he knew what it was. The sound told him. He saw the hole appear in the sphere. A round hole that opened inward. Dust puffed outward.

Wham, wham, wham!

The negatron! The blood brother of the defense screen, its energies concentrated into a pencil of radiation. Faster than anyone could see it happen, three more holes appeared in the sphere, driving through its outer shell, punching into the machinery at its heart.

The sphere shuddered under the impact. It turned. Light spewed out of it, beaming viciously into this alien sky without direction. Smoke boiled from the ball. Turning it seemed to roll along the sky. It looked like a huge burning snowball rolling down some vast hill.

Ron Val lifted a white face from the sighting 'scope of the negatron.

"Did—did I get him?"

"I'll say you did!" Hargraves heard somebody shout exultantly. He was surprised to discover his own voice was doing the shouting. The sphere was finished, done for. It was out of the fight, rolling down the vast hill of the sky, it would smash on the planet below.

They were following it.

There was still no answer from the engine room.

"Space suits!" Hargraves ordered. "Nielson, you stay here. Ron Val, you others, come with me."

CHAPTER II

Vegan World

THE engine room was crammed to the roof with machinery. The bulked housings of the atomics, their heavy screens shutting off the deadly radiations generated in the heart of energy seething within the twin domes, were at the front. They looked like two blast furnaces that had somehow wandered into a space ship by mistake and hadn't been able to find their way out again. The fires of hell, hotter than any blast furnace had ever been, seethed within them.

Behind the atomics were the Kruchek drivers, twin brawny giants chained to the treadmill they pushed through the skies. Silent now. Not grumbling at their task. Loafing. Like lazy slaves conscious of their power, they worked only when the lash was on them.

Between the drivers was the control panel. Ninety-nine percent automatic, those controls. They needed little human attention, and got little. There were never more than three men on duty here. This engine room almost operated itself.

It had ceased to operate itself, Jed Hargraves saw, as he forced open the last stubborn air-tight door separating the engine room from the rest of the ship. Ceased because— Involuntarily he cried out.

He could see the sky.

A great V-shaped notch straddled the back of the ship. Something, striking high on the curve of the hull, had driven through inches of magna steel, biting a gigantic chunk out of the ship. The beam from the sphere! That flashing streak of light that had driven through the defense screen. It had struck here.

"Jed! They're dead!"

That was Ron Val's voice, choking over the radio. One of the men in this engine room had been Hal Sarkoff, a black-browed giant from somewhere in Montana. Engines had behaved for Sarkoff. Intuitively he had seemed to know mechanics.

He and Ron Val had been particular friends.

"The air went," Hargraves said. "When that hole was knocked in the hull, the air went. The automatic doors blocked off the rest of the ship. The poor devils—"

The air had gone and the cold had come. He could see Sarkoff's body lying beside one of the drivers. The two other men were across the room. A door to the stern compartment was there. They were crumpled against it.

Hargraves winced with pain. He should have ordered everyone into space suits. The instant Nielson reported the approach of the sphere, Hargraves should have shouted, "Space suits" into the mike. He hadn't.

The receiver in his space suit crisped with sound.

"Jed! Have you got into that engine room yet? For cripes sake, Jed, we're falling."

That was Nielson, on the bridge. He sounded frantic.

Sixteen feet the first second, then thirty-two, then sixty-four. They had miles to fall, but their rate of fall progressed geometrically. They had spent many minutes fighting their way through the air tight doors. One hundred and twenty-eight feet the fourth second. Jed's mind was racing.

No, by thunder, that was acceleration under an earth gravity. They didn't know the gravity here. It might be less.

It might be more.

Ron Val had run forward and was kneeling beside Sarkoff.

"Let them go," Hargraves said roughly. "Ron Val, you check the drivers. You—" Swiftly he assigned them tasks, reserving the control panel for himself.

THEY were specialists. Noble, the blond youth, frantically examining the atomics, was a bio-chemist. Ushur, the powerfully built man who had stood at Ron Val's right hand on the negatron, was an archeologist.

They were engineers now. They had to be.

"Nothing seems to be wrong here." That was Ron Val, from the drivers.

"The atomics are working." That was Noble reporting.

"Then what the hell is wrong?" At the control panel, Hargraves saw what was wrong. The damned controls were automatic, with temperature and air pressure cut-offs. When the air had gone from the engine room, that meant

something was wrong. The controls had automatically cut off the drivers. The ship had stopped moving.

A manual control was provided. Hargraves shoved the switch home. An oil-immersed control thudded. The loafing giants grunted as the lash struck them, roared with pain as they got hastily to work on their treadmill.

The ship moved forward.

"We're moving!" That was Red Nielson shouting. The controls on the bridge were responding now. "I'm going to burn a hole in space getting us away from here."

"No!" said Hargraves.

"What?" There was incredulous doubt in Nielson's voice. "That damned sphere came from this planet."

"Can't help it. We've got to land."

"Land here, now!"

"There's a hole as big as the side of a house in the ship. No air in the engine room. Without air, we can't control the temperature. If we go into space, the engine room temperature will drop almost to absolute zero. These drivers are not designed to work in that temperature, and they won't work in it. We have to land and repair the ship before we dare go into space."

"But—"

"We land here!"

There was a split second of silence. "Okay, Jed," Nielson said. "But if we run into another of those spheres—"

"We'll know what to do about it. Ron Val. Ushur. Back to the bridge and man the negatron. If you see anything that even looks suspicious, beam it."

Ron Val and Usher dived through the door that led forward.

"Stern observation post. Are you alive back there?"

"We heard you, Jed. We're alive all right."

Back of the engine room, tucked away in the stern, was another negatron.

"Shoot on sight!" Hargraves said.

The Third Interstellar Expedition was coming in to land—with her fangs bared.

Jed Hargraves called a volunteer to hold the switch—it had to be held in by hand, otherwise it would automatically kick out again—and went forward to the bridge. Red Nielson gladly relinquished the controls to him.

"The sphere crashed over there," Nielson said, waving vaguely to the right.

NOT until he stepped on the bridge did Jed Hargraves realize how close a call they had had. The fight had started well outside the upper limits of the atmosphere. They were well inside it now. Another few minutes and they would have screamed to a flaming crash here on this world and the Third Interstellar Expedition would have accomplished only half its mission, the least important half.

He shoved the nose of the ship down, the giants working eagerly at their treadmill now, as if they realized they had been caught loafing on the job and were trying to make amends. The planet swam up toward them. He barely heard the voice of Noble reporting a chemical test of the air that was now swirling around the ship. "—oxygen, so much; water vapor; nitrogen—" The air was breathable. They would not have to attempt repairs in space suits, then.

Abruptly, as they dropped lower, the contour of the planet seemed to change from the shape of a ball to the shape of a cup. The eyes did that. The eyes were tricky. But Jed knew his eyes were not tricking him when they brought him impressions of the surface below them.

A gently rolling world sweeping away into the distance, moving league after league into dim infinities, appeared before his eyes. No mountains, no hills, even. Gentle slopes rolling slowly downward into plains. No large rivers. Small streams winding among trees. Almost immediately below them was one of the lakes Ron Val had seen through his telescope. The lake was alive with blue light reflected from the — No, the light came from Vega, not Sol. They were light years away from the warming rays of the friendly sun.

Jed lowered the ship until she barely cleared the ground, sent her slowly forward seeking what he wanted. There was a grove of giant trees beside the lake. Overhead their foliage closed in an arch that would cut out the sight of the sky. This was what he wanted. He turned the ship around.

"Hey!" said Nielson.

"I'm going to back her out of sight among those t r ees," Hargraves answered. "I'm hunting a hole to hide in while we lie up and lick our wounds."

Overhead, boughs crashed as the ship slid out of sight. Gently he relaxed the controls, let her drop an inch at a time until she rested on the ground. Then he opened the switches, and grunting with relief, the giants laid themselves down on their treadmill and promptly went to sleep. For the first time in months the ship was silent.

"Negatron crews remain at your posts. I'm going to take a look."

The lock hissed as it opened before him. Hargraves, Nielson, Noble, stepped out, the captain going first. The ground was only a couple of feet away but he lowered himself to it with the precise caution that a twenty-foot jump would have necessitated. He was not unaware of the implications of this moment. His was the first human foot to tread the soil of a planet circling Vega. The great-grand-children of his great-grand-children would tell their sons about this.

The soil was springy under his feet, possessing an elasticity that he had not remembered as natural with turf. Opening his helmet, he sniffed the air. It was cool and alive with a heady fragrance that came from growing vegetation, a quality the ship's synthesizers, for all the ingenuity incorporated in them, could not duplicate. Tasting the air, the cells of his lungs eagerly shouted for more. He sucked it in, and the tensions that kept his body all steel springs and whipcord relaxed a little. A breeze stirred among the trees.

"Sweet Pete!" he gasped.

"That's what I was trying to tell you as we landed," Nielson said. "This is not a forest. This is a grove. These trees didn't just grow here in straight orderly lines. They were *planted!* We are hiding in what may be the equivalent of somebody's apple orchard."

The trees were giants. Twenty feet through at the butt, they rose a hundred feet into the air. Diminishing in the distance, they moved in regular rows down to the shore of the lake, forming a pleasant grove miles in extent. A reddish fruit, not unlike apples, grew on them.

If this was an orchard, where was the owner?

CHAPTER III

The Four Visitors

"SOMEBODY coming!" the lookout called.

Jed Hargraves dropped the shovel. Behind him the hiss of an electric cutting torch and the whang of a heavy hammer went into sudden silence. Back there, a hundreds yards away, they had already begun work on the

ship, attempting to repair the hole gouged in the stout magna steel of the hull. They had heard the call of the lookout and were dropping tools to pick up weapons. Jed's hand slid down to his belt to the compact vibration pistol holstered there. He pulled the gun, held it ready in his hand. Ron Val and Nielson did the same.

Vega, slanting downward, was near the western horizon. The grove was a mass of shadows. Through the shadows something was coming.

"They're human!" Ron Val gasped.

Hargraves said nothing. His fingers tightened around the butt of the pistol as he waited. He saw them clearly now. There were four of them. They looked like—old men. Four tribal graybeards out for a stroll in the cool of the late afternoon. Each carried a staff. They were walking toward the ship. Then they saw the little group that stood apart and turned toward them.

"The teletron. Will you go get it, please, Ron Val?"

Nodding, the astro-navigator ran back to the ship. The teletron was a new gadget, invented just before the expedition left earth. Far from perfection as yet, it was intended to aid in establishing telepathic communication between persons who had no common language. Sometimes it worked, a little. More often it didn't. But it might be useful here. Ron Val was panting when he returned with it.

"Are you going to talk to them, Jed?"

"I'm going to try."

The four figures approached. Hargraves smiled. That was to show his good intentions. A smile ought to be common language everywhere.

The four strangers did not return his smile. They just stopped and looked at him with no trace of emotion on their faces.

They looked human. They weren't, of course. Parallel evolution accounted for the resemblance, like causes producing like results.

Nielson was watching them like a hawk. Without making an aggressive move, the way he held his gun showed he was ready to go into action at a moment's notice. Behind them, the ship was silent, its crew alert. Hargraves bent to manipulate the complicated tuning of the teletron.

"I am Thulon," a voice whispered in his brain. "No need for that."

Jed Hargraves' leaped to his feet. He caught startled glances from Ron Val and Nielson and knew they had heard and understood too. Understood, rather. There had been nothing for the ears to hear.

"Thulon! No need for — *I understood you without—*"

Thulon smiled. He was taller than the average human, and very slender. "We are natural telepaths. So there is no need to use your instrument."

"Uh? Natural telepaths! Well, I'm damned!"

"Damned? I cannot quite grasp the meaning of the word. Your mind is radiating on an emotional level. Do you wish to indicate surprise? I cannot grasp your thinking."

Hargraves choked, fought for control of his mind. For a minute it had run away with him. He brought it to heel.

"What are you doing here?" Thulon asked.

HARGRAVES blinked at the directness of the question. They certainly wasted no time getting down to business. "We—" He caught himself. No telling how much they could take directly from his mind!

"We came from—far away." He tried to force his thoughts into nar-

row channels. "We—"

"There is no need to be afraid." Thulon smiled gently. Or was there wiliness in that smile? Was this stranger attempting to lure him into a feeling of false security?

"I meant, what are you doing *here?*" Thulon continued. His eyes went down to the ground.

There was only one shovel on the ground. One shovel was all there had been in the ship. Thulon's glance went to it, went on.

There were three mounds. The soft mould had dug easily. It had all been patted back into place. On the middle mound Ron Val had finished placing a small cross that he had hastily improvised from the ship's stores. Scratched in the metal was a name: Hal Sarkoff.

"We had an outbreak of buboes," Hargraves said. "That's a disease. Three of our companions died and we landed here to bury them. We had just finished doing this when you arrived."

"Died! Three of you died? And you hid them under these mounds?"

"Yes. Of course. There was nothing else we could—"

"You are going to leave them here in the ground!"

"Certainly." Hargraves was wondering if this method of disposing of the dead violated some tribal taboo of this people. Different races disposed of their dead in different ways. He did not know the customs of the inhabitants of this world. "If we have offended against your customs, we are sorry."

"No. There was no offense." Thulon blanketed his thoughts. Hargraves could almost feel the blanket slip into place.

"You came in that ship?" Thulon pointed toward the vessel.

"Yes." It was impossible to conceal this fact.

"Ah." Thulon hesitated, seemed to grope through his mind for the exact shade of expression he wished to convey. Hargraves was aware that the stranger's eyes probed through him, measured him. "It would interest us to examine the vessel. Would you permit this?"

"Certainly." Hargraves knew that Red Nielson jerked startled eyes toward him.

"Jed!" Nielson spoke in protest.

"Shut up!" Hargraves snapped. His body and his mind was a mass of tightly wound springs but his face was calm and his voice was suave. He turned to Thulon. "I will be glad to take you through our ship. However, I do not recommend it."

"No?"

"It might be dangerous, for you and your companions. We have had three cases of buboes, resulting in three deaths. All of us have had shots of immunizing serum and we hope we will have no more cases. However, the germs are unquestionably present in the atmosphere of the ship. Since you probably have no immunity to the disease, to breathe the tainted air would almost certainly result in an attack. This disease is fatal in nine cases out of ten. I therefore suggest you do not enter the ship. In fact," Hargraves concluded, "I was about to say that it might not be wise for you and your companions even to come near us, because of the possibility that you might contract the disease."

HAD he gotten the story over it? Was it convincing? Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Ron Val glance at him. When he had said their companions had died of buboes, Ron Val had looked as if he thought he was out of his mind. Now Ron Val understood. "Good going, Jed," his glance

seemed to say.

"Hargraves—" This was Nielson speaking. His face was black.

"I suggest," said Jed casually, "that you let me handle this."

Nielson gulped. "Yes. Yes, sir," he said.

Thulon's companions had been paying attention to the conversation. But all the time they were stealing glances at the ship. With half their minds, they seemed to be listening to what was being said. But the other half of their minds was interested in that silent ship hidden under the trees. Were they merely curious, such as any savage might be? Or was this group making a reconnaissance? Hargraves did not know. It did not look like a reconnaissance in force.

"Do you really think we might contract this disease?" Thulon asked.

Hargraves shrugged. "I'm not certain. You might not. It would all depend on the way your bodies reacted to the organism causing the disease."

"Under such circumstances, you show little consideration for our welfare by bringing a plague ship to land here."

"We didn't know you existed. I assure you, however, that if you will remain away from the ship until we have an opportunity to disinfect it thoroughly, any danger to your people will be very slight. On the other hand, if you wish to look our vessel over, to assure yourselves that we are not a menace to you—which we are not—I shall be glad to take you through the ship."

Was he drawing it too fine? He spoke clearly and forcefully. The words, of course, would carry no meaning. But the thought that went along with them would convey what he wanted to say.

"Ah." The thought came from Thulon. "Perhaps—" Again the blanket came over his mind and Hargraves had the impression Thulon was conferring with his companions.

The silent conference ended.

"Perhaps," Thulon said. "It would be better if we returned to visit you tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow."

He bowed. Without another word he and his silent companions turned and began to walk slowly away. Not until he saw the little group slipping away into the dusk did Jed realize he had been holding his breath.

"Hargraves!" Nielson's voice was harsh. "Are you going to let them get away? You fool! That sphere came from this world. Have you forgotten?"

"I have forgotten nothing, I hope."

"But you offered to take them through the ship! They would have seen how badly damaged she is."

"Of course I offered to take them through the ship, then made it impossible for them to accept. We can't stick up 'No Trespassing' signs here. This is their world. We don't know a damned thing about it, or about them. We can't run and we don't want to fight, if we can help it. Furthermore, Nielson, I want you to learn to control your tongue. Remember that in the future, will you?"

For a second, Nielson glared at him. "Yes, sir."

"All right. Go on back to the ship."

NIELSON went clumping back toward the vessel. Hargraves turned to Ron Val.

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know, Jed. There is something about it that I don't like a little bit. They can read minds. Maybe that is what I don't like because I don't know how to react to it. Jed, it may be that we are in great danger here."

"There is little doubt about *that*," Hargraves answered. "Tonight we will stand watches. Tomorrow we will make a reconnaissance of our own."

Dusk came over the grove. Vega hesitated on the horizon as though trying to make up its mind, then abruptly took the plunge and dived from sight beyond the rim of the world. Night came abruptly, hiding the ship and its occupants. In the sky overhead, stars twinkled like the eyes of watchful wolves.

CHAPTER IV

The Monster

THEY blacked out the ship before they moved it, carefully covering each port with paper, then showing no lights. Hargraves handled the controls himself, slowly turning current into the drivers so their grunting would not reveal what was happening.

"Are we going to take her up high for tonight?" Ushur, the archeologist asked. "She will fly all right as long as we stay in the atmosphere. We would be safer up high, it seems to me."

"Safer from ground attack, yes," Hargraves said thoughtfully. "However, I'm afraid we would be more exposed to attack from a ship."

"Oh! That damned sphere. I had forgotten about it."

Hargraves moved the ship less than a mile, carefully hid her among the trees. Then he posted guards outside all the ports. He took the first watch himself, in the control room. Ron Val was waiting for him there. The astro-navigator's face was grave. "Jed," he said. "I've been talking to several of the fellows. They don't believe you are taking a sufficiently realistic view of our situation. They don't believe you are facing the facts."

"Um. What facts have I been evading?"

"You apparently don't realize that it will take months—if it can be done at all—to repair the damage to the ship."

Hargraves settled deep into his chair. He looked at the astro-navigator. Ron Val wasn't angry. Nor was he mutinous. He wasn't challenging authority. He was just scared.

"Ron," he said, "according to the agreement under which we sailed, any time the majority of the members of this expedition wants a new captain, they can have him."

"It isn't that."

"I know. You fellows are scared. Hells bells, man! What do you think I am?"

Ron Val's eyes popped open. "Jed! Are you? You don't show it. You don't seem even to appreciate the spot we're in."

Hargraves slowly lit a cigarette. The fingers holding the tiny lighter did not shake. "If I had been the type to show it, do you think I would have been selected to head this expedition?"

"No. But—"

"Because I haven't made an official announcement that we may not be able to repair the ship, you seem to think I don't realize the fact. I know how big a hole has been ripped in our hull. I know the ship is made of magna steel, the toughest, hardest, most beautiful metal yet invented. I know the odds are we can't repair the hole in the hull. We don't have the metal. We don't have the tools to work it. I know these things. When I didn't call it to your attention, I assumed it was equally obvious to everyone else that we may never leave this planet."

"Jed! Never leave this planet! Never—go home! That can't be right."

"See," said Hargraves. "When you

get the truth flung in your face, even you crack wide open. Yes, it's the truth. The fact you fellows think I'm not facing—the one you don't dare face—is that we may be marooned here for the rest of our lives."

That was that. Ron Val went aft. Hargraves took up his vigil on the bridge. At midnight Ron Val came forward to relieve him.

"I told them what you said, Jed," the astro-navigator said. "We're back of you one hundred per cent."

Hargraves grinned a little. "Thanks," he said. "We were selected to work together as a unit. As long as we remain a unit, we will have a chance against any enemy."

DOG-TIRED, he went to his bunk and rolled in. It seemed to him he had barely closed his eyes before a hand grabbed him by the shoulder and a shaken voice shouted in his ear. "Jed! Wake up."

"Who is it? What's wrong?" The room was dark and he couldn't see who was shaking him.

"Ron Val." The astro-navigator's voice was hoarse with the maddest, wildest fright Hargraves had ever heard. "The—the damnedest thing has happened!"

"What?"

"Hal Sarkoff—" That was as far as Ron Val could get.

"What about him?"

"He's outside trying to get in!"

"Have you gone insane? Sarkoff is dead. You helped me bury him."

"I know it. Jed, he's outside. He wants in."

Hargraves had gone to bed without removing even his shoes. He ran forward to the control room, Ron Val pounding behind him. Lights had been turned on here, in defiance of orders. Someone had summoned the crew. They were all here, all eighteen who remained alive. The inner door of the lock was open. A dazed guard, who had been on watch outside the lock, was standing in the door. He had a pistol in his hand but he looked as if he didn't know what to do with it.

In the center of a group of men too frightened to move was a black-haired, rugged giant.

"Sarkoff!" Hargraves gasped.

The giant's head turned until his gaze was centered on the captain. "You moved the ship," he said accusingly. "I had the damnedest time finding it in the dark. What did you move the ship for, Jed?"

If some super-magician had cast a spell over the little group he could not have produced a more complete stasis. No one moved. No one seemed to breathe. All motion, all action, all thinking, had stopped.

Sarkoff's face went from face to face.

"What the heck is the matter with you guys?" he demanded. "Am I poison, or something?"

He seemed bewildered.

"Where—where are the others?" Ron Val stammered.

"What others? What the heck are you talking about, Ron?"

"Nevins and Reese. We—we buried them with you. Where are they?"

"How the hell do I kn—— *You buried them with me?"* Sarkoff's face went from bewilderment to inexplicable good nature. "Trying to pull my leg, huh? Okay. I can go along with a gag." He looked again at Hargraves. "But I can't go along with that gag of moving the ship after you sent me out scouting. Why didn't you wait for me? Wandering around among all these trees, I might have got lost and got myself killed. Why did you do that, Jed?" he finished angrily.

"We were—ah—afraid of an at-

tack," Hargraves choked out. "Sorry, Hal, but we—we had to move the ship. We would have—hunted you up, tomorrow."

SARKOFF was not a man who was ever long angry about anything. The apology satisfied him. He grinned. "Okay, Jed. Forget it. Jeepers! I'm so hungry I could eat a cow. How about a couple of those synthetic steaks we got in the ice-box?" His eyes went around the group, came to rest on the astro-navigator. "How about it, Ron? How about me and you fixing us up some chow?"

"Sure," said Hargraves. "Go on back to the galley and start fixing yourself whatever you want. You go with him, Ron. I'll handle your job up here while you're gone."

Nodding dumbly, Ron Val started to follow Sarkoff toward the galley. "One minute," Hargraves called after him. "I want to check something with you before you go!"

Sarkoff kept going. Ron Val returned. "Take your cues from him," Hargraves said. "You know him better than anyone else. Whatever he says, you agree. Casually bring up past events and watch his reaction. *Your job is to find out if that is really Hal Sarkoff!*"

The astro-navigator, his face white, clumped toward the galley.

Hargraves faced a torrent of questions.

"Jed! We buried him."

"Jed. He had been in that engine room without air for at least ten minutes before we got there. He can't be alive."

"No air. Temperature diving toward absolute zero. He was frozen stiff, Jed, before we moved him. We left him where he was until long after we landed."

"I know," Hargraves said. "There is no doubt about it. I used a stethoscope on him as soon as I could get to it after we landed. *He was dead.* There wasn't a sign of life."

Frightened faces looked at him. Awed faces. Bewildered faces.

"What did you mean when you told Ron Val to find out if that is really Sarkoff?"

"Just what I said. That may be Sarkoff. It may be something that looks like Sarkoff, acts like him, talks like him—*but isn't he!*"

"That—that's impossible."

"How do we know what is possible here and what isn't?"

"What are we going to do?"

"We're going to act just as we would if that were Sarkoff. We're going to pick up our cues from him? You remember he said he was out scouting when we moved the ship. That is his story. We will not question it. We will act as though it were true, until we know what is happening. Now everybody back to his post. Act as if nothing had happened. And for the love of Pete, don't ask me what is going on. I don't know any more than you do."

They didn't want to obey that order. They had just seen a dead man walking, had heard him talking, had spoken to him. There was comfort in just being with each other. Hargraves walked to the bridge, waited. Eventually, discipline sent them back to their posts. He kept on waiting. Ron Val returned.

"I don't know, Jed. I just don't know. We were in school together. I brought up incidents that happened in school, things that only Hal and I knew. *Jed, he knew them.*"

WITH the exception of a hooded blue lamp on the bridge, all lights had been turned off again. The con-

trol room was in darkness. Ron Val was an uneasy shadow talking from dim blackness.

"Then you think that it is really Sarkoff?"

"I don't know."

"But if he remembers things that only Hal could know—"

"He remembers things that he can't know."

"Um. What things?"

"He asked me how much progress had been made in repairing the ship. Jed, he must have died before he knew the ship had been damaged."

"Not necessarily," said Hargraves thoughtfully. "He might have been conscious for one or two minutes after the beam struck us. He would know that the ship had been damaged. What did you tell him?"

"I changed the subject."

"Good for you. If he isn't Sarkoff, the one thing he might want to know is whether the ship has been repaired. What else?"

"Jed, he remembers *everything* that happened after the ship was attacked. We almost crashed before we got the engines started. He remembers that. He remembers hiding the ship among the trees."

Hargraves stirred. The keen logic of his mind was being blunted by facts that would not fit into any logical pattern. He tried to think. His mind refused the effort. Dead men ought not to remember things that happened after they died. But a dead man had remembered!

For an instant panic walked through the captain's mind. Then he got it under control. There was always an answer to every question, a solution to every problem. Or was there? He went hunting facts.

"Does he remember being buried?"

Even in the darkness he could feel Ron Val shiver. "No," Ron Val said. "He doesn't remember. Just as soon as we landed, he thinks you sent him out, to scout the surrounding territory for possible enemies."

"Does he know that we had visitors in his absence?"

"No. Or if he does, he didn't mention it, and I didn't ask. He says he was returning when he saw the ship being moved. He says he tried to follow, but lost it in the darkness. He says he had the devil's own time finding it again, and he's still hot about being left behind."

Again Hargraves had to fight the panic in his mind. This much seemed obvious. Sarkoff's memory was accurate—until the ship landed. Then it went into fantasy, into error. If one thing was certain, he had not been sent out to scout for enemies. If there was another fact that was immutable, he had been buried.

"Where is he now?" Hargraves asked abruptly.

"In his bunk, snoring. He ate enough for two men, yawned, said he was sleepy. He was sound asleep almost as soon as he touched the blankets."

Ron Val's voice relapsed into silence. The whole ship was silent.

"Jed, what are we going to do?"

"You bunk with him, don't you?"

"Yes. Jed! You don't mean—"

Hargraves cleared his throat. "This is not an order. You don't have to do it if you don't want to. But Sarkoff must be watched. Are you willing to go back to the room you two shared together and get into the upper deck of your bunk just as if nothing has happened?"

"Yes," said Ron Val.

"Somebody must be with him—all the time. You stay awake. When he gets up, you get up. Whatever he does,

you stay with him. I'll have you relieved as soon as possible. And, Ron—"

"Yes."

"You have something a man could use for courage."

Silently, Ron Val walked out of the control room. He fumbled his way through the door and his steps echoed down the corridor that led to the sleeping quarters.

Hargraves sat in thought. Then he, too, left the control room.

"Noble, you're a bio-chemist. You come with me. Nielson, you take over here in the control room. In my absence you are in command."

"Yes sir," Nielson said. "But what are you going to do?"

"See what is in a grave we dug yesterday," Hargraves answered.

CHAPTER V

What the Graves Revealed

HARGRAVES carried the shovel. He and Noble were armed, and very much alert.

"When you ask me if it is chemically possible for a man—or an animal—to freeze, die, be buried, then rise again and live, I cannot answer," Noble said. "So far as I know, it is not possible. The physical act of freezing will involve tremendous and seemingly irreversible changes in the body cells. Thawing will produce almost immediate bacterial action, which also seems irreversible. All I can say is, if Hal Sarkoff is alive, we have seen a miracle that contradicts chemical laws as we know them."

"And if he is not alive, we face a miracle of duplication. Whatever it is that is sleeping back in the ship, it looks, talks, acts, like Hal Sarkoff, even to memory. Can you suggest any method by which flesh and bone could be so speedily moulded into a living image of a man whom we know died?"

"No," said Noble bluntly. "Jed, do you realize all the possible implications of this situation?"

"Probably not," Hargraves answered. "Some that I do recognize, I exclude from my thoughts."

His tone was so harsh that Noble said nothing more.

Dawn was already breaking over this Vegan world. The sky in the east was the color of pearl. In the trees over them, creatures that sounded like birds were beginning to chirp.

They reached the place where they had buried Hal Sarkoff and his two companions.

The graves were empty.

No effort had been made to conceal the fact that the graves had been opened. The dirt had been shoveled out again and had not been shoveled back.

There were marks in the dirt, the tracks of sandaled feet. "Thulon, the three who were with him, wore sandals!" Hargraves rasped. "They came back here. They opened these graves."

"But what happened after that? Are you suggesting those primitive graybeards resurrected Hal Sarkoff?"

"I'm not suggesting anything because I don't know anything," Hargraves answered. "I am just remembering that Thulon and the three who were with him *looked human too!* I am also remembering that the sphere which attacked us seemingly was without a crew. Our beams blasted it wide open. It was seemingly filled with machinery. Nothing else. If there were any intelligent creatures in it, they were in no form that we recognize. Come on!" Hargraves started running toward the ship.

The ship, badly damaged as it was, represented their sole hope of survival. Without it, they would be helpless.

Hal Sarkoff was with the ship. Or

the thing that was masquerading as Sarkoff. Thulon had looked human too. Possibly Sarkoff and his two dead comrades had been removed from their graves in order to make possible a perfect duplication of their bodies, the probing of cell structure, both body and brain. Perhaps the things that lurked here on this world could read memories from dead minds. That might be the explanation of Sarkoff's memory.

The important fact was that Sarkoff's body was not in its grave. Where so much was unknown, this was one indisputable fact. The thing that was on the ship must be placed not only under heavy guard but in a cage from which escape was impossible. Then an examination could begin.

There was evil on this world. The trees, the vegetation, the ground under his racing feet, was evil. In his calmer moments Jed Hargraves would have said that evil was another word for danger. He wasn't calm now. The panic he had been rigidly excluding from his mind had burst the dam he had built before it. He could feel danger in the air. It was in the dawn, in the light of the sky. It was everywhere. He and his companions were aliens on this world, and the planet was striking at them, striving to eliminate them, contriving to destroy them.

He heard it before he saw it.

Something was grunting in the air. Above the tops of the trees something was grunting. He needed seconds to recognize the sound. Then he recognized it. And jerked himself to a halt, his eyes wildly probing upward.

He saw it.

THE ship. The grunting roar had come from the Kruchek drivers fighting the gravity of the planet.

The ship had taken off without them.

Had Nielson gone mad? Had he seen danger approaching and jumped the ship into the sky to escape it?

"Wait! Nielson! Pick us up!"

The ship flew on. Gaining speed, it passed over their heads. They caught another glimpse of it as it passed over an opening in the branches of the trees. Then it was gone, the throb of the drivers dying quickly away.

"Nielson will come back for us." Noble's voice, usually poised and assured, was garbled. "He'll return and pick us up. He won't leave us here."

"He had some reason for taking off," Hargraves heard himself saying. "He'll come back. He has to." Subconsciously he knew that this, at the very best, was wishful thinking.

The ship had no more than vanished until another sound came to their ears, that of men shouting. A group came into sight among the trees, following along the ground the course the ship had taken through the air.

"They're our fellows!" Hargraves heard Noble gasp.

"What happened?" the captain demanded, as the group approached.

Nielson was in the lead. There was a bruise on his cheek and his right eye was already beginning to turn black. "I'll tell you what happened!" he said savagely. "Sarkoff and Ron Val took over the ship, that's what happened!"

"Ron Val!"

"That's what I said. Ron Val was helping him. They pulled guns. Before we knew what was happening, they had herded us together and were shoving us outside. I tried to stop it and Sarkoff took a poke at me."

"It wasn't really Sarkoff, then?" Noble whispered.

"Any damned fool would have known that!" Nielson answered. He spoke to the bio-chemist but his eyes were on Hargraves. "I'm going to repeat that, so there won't be any misunderstand-

Fists lashed out, weapons appeared, and cries of fury rent the air

ing of my meaning. Any damned fool would have known that a dead man doesn't get up out of his grave and come to life again. Except you, Hargraves. You always were a sucker for fairy stories."

Jed Hargraves winced with every word that was spoken. They kept on coming.

"You ought to have known that thing wasn't Hal Sarkoff. Any man in his right senses would have known it instantly. Any man fit to command would have taken measures to meet the situation, either by destroying that thing, or locking it up. But you were running things, Hargraves. You were in charge. And you had to sit back and think before you would act. You had to make sure you were right, before you went ahead. Your negligence, Hargraves, cost us our only chance of ever returning home."

Nielson's voice was harsh with anger.

And—Hargraves recognized the bitter truth—every word Nielson uttered was correct. Whatever the thing was that had come to the ship, he should have recognized it as a source of danger. He had so recognized it. But he had not acted.

"I—"

"Shut up!" Nielson snapped. "According to our agreement, any time you are shown to be unfit to command, you may be removed by a vote of the majority. There is no question but that you have shown yourself unfit to be in charge of this expedition."

NO TIME was wasted in reaching a decision. To Nielson's question as to whether Hargraves should be removed from command, there was a chorus of "Ayes."

"No," said one voice. It was Usher, the archeologist.

"State your objection," Nielson rasped.

"The old one about changing horses in mid-stream," the archeologist answered. "Also the old one about not jumping to conclusions before all the evidence is in."

"What evidence isn't in?"

"We don't know why Ron Val joined Sarkoff," the archeologist answered.

"What difference does that make? We don't even know that Ron Val was still himself. The thing that looked like Ron Val might have been another monstrosity like Sarkoff."

"So it might," the archeologist shrugged. "Anyhow my vote is not important. I'm just putting it in for the sake of the record, if there ever is a record. I would also like to mention that if ever we needed discipline and unity, now is the time."

"We will have discipline, I promise you," Nielson said. "Hargraves, you are removed from command, understand?"

"Yes," said Hargraves steadily.

Only one ballot was needed to put Nielson in charge.

"All right," said Ushur to the new captain. "You're the boss now. We're all behind you. What are you going to do?"

"Do? I—" Nielson looked startled. He glanced at Hargraves.

The former captain sighed. It was easy enough to elect a new leader. Vehemently he wished that all problems could be solved so easily.

"I suggest," he said, "—and this is only a suggestion—that we attempt to find the ship, and if possible, to regain possession of her. She is the only tool we have to work with."

"That is exactly what I was going to say," Nielson said emphatically. "Find the ship."

To give him credit, he set about the job in a workmanlike manner, sending two scouts ahead of the main group, throwing out a scout on each flank. The only way they could hope to find the ship was by following the course it had taken through the air. Since Sarkoff, in taking over the vessel, had not disarmed them, each possessed a vibration pistol. In a fight against ordinary enemies they would be able to give a good account of themselves. But would any enemy they met likely be ordinary?

Hargraves drew Usher aside. "I would like to talk to you," he said. "What actually happened when the ship was taken?"

"I don't know, Jed," the archeologist ruefully answered. "I was in my cabin. The first thing I knew I heard a hell of a hullabaloo going on up in the control room. I dashed up there to see what was going on."

"What was happening?"

"Nielson, Rodney, Turner, and a couple of others were there. So were —well, they looked like Sarkoff and

Ron Val. Nielson was getting up off the floor. Sarkoff and Ron Val had both drawn their guns and were covering the group. When I came charging in, Sarkoff covered me. Before I could recover from my surprise, he and Ron Val had kicked every one of us out of the ship. Then they took off." The archeologist shook his shaggy head.

"Ron Val was helping?"

"No question about it. Which means, of course, that he was either under some subtle form of hypnosis, or *it* wasn't Ron Val. I would bet my life on his loyalty."

"SO WOULD I," said Hargraves. And the memory came back of how thrilled Ron Val had been at the prospect of landing on this world. "It would mean a lot to find people here. We could exchange experiences, learn a lot," Ron Val had said, his face glowing at the thought. All the others had felt the same way. The Third Interstellar Expedition had no military ambitions. It was not bent on conquest. The solar system had outgrown military expeditions, war, and the thought of war, and cruisers went out from it not to fight but to learn. Knowledge was the thing they sought, all knowledge, so the human race could determine its place in the cosmos, could know the history of all things past, could possibly forecast the shape of things to come.

The landing of the Third Interstellar Expedition on this Vegan world had been a part of a vast evolution, a march that, starting on earth so long ago that all history of it was forever lost, was now reaching out across the cosmos. A new evolution! Ron Val had always been talking about this new evolution. It was one of his favorite subjects.

"What do you make of this world?" Hargraves asked abruptly. "The only sign of civilization we have seen is this vast grove. No cities, no industrial plants, no evidence of progress. Yet the spherical ship that attacked us certainly indicates a highly mechanical civilization. Of course there may be cities here that we haven't seen, but as we landed we saw a large land area. No roads were visible, no canals, not even any cultivated fields. What does all this mean to you, as an archeologist?"

"Nothing," Usher answered promptly. "I would say this country is a wilderness. But the trees planted in regular rows disprove this. On earth, at least, centuries would be required for trees as large as these to grow. Forestry, planned centuries in advance, can only come from a high and stable culture. However, as you say, all other signs of this high culture are absent, no cities, no transportation facilities, apparently damned few inhabitants—we have seen only four. All civilizations with which we are familiar move through recognized stages, first the nomadic stage, which involves tending flocks and herds. Then comes the tilling of the soil, in which farming is the principal occupation of most of the people. After that, with industrialization, we have cities developing. If there is another stage we have not reached it on earth."

"Do you think they might have reached the final stage here?" Hargraves questioned.

"I don't know what the final stage may be," the archeologist answered. "Also, and this is more important, I can't begin to guess at the real nature of the inhabitants of this world. Until I do know their real nature, what they look like, what they eat, where they sleep, what they think, I can't even guess intelligently about them. However," Usher broke off with a wry grin, "all these philosophical observations are of no importance while our own

necks are threatened with the ax."

Vega was straight overhead when they found the ship. One of the advance scouts came hurrying back with the information.

"She is lying in a little meadow beside the lake," the scout reported. "They're doing something to her. I can't tell what. But the trees extend to within fifty yards of her. We can approach that near without being seen."

CHAPTER VI

The Capture of the Ship

NIELSON made his dispositions with care. The ship lay in a little meadow where the trees bent inward from the blue water of the lake to form a cove. Her nose was pointed toward the water and her tail was almost in the trees. Nielson sent three men on a wide circuit. They were to attack from the farther side. It was to be a feint. While the three men drew attention to them, the main body was to charge.

"We have every chance of succeeding," Nielson said. "And if we do gain the ship again, this time we won't stay here. Vega has at least two planets. The ship will fly to the other one without repairs. You should have thought of that, Hargraves."

"There are a lot of things I should have thought of and didn't," Hargraves answered. There was no animosity in his tone. "What I would like to know is what they are doing there beside the ship?"

Thulon and his three companions were visible beside the vessel. They were busily engaged in setting up a device of some kind. Others of their species had joined them until there were possibly thirty or forty present. Through the the gaping hole in the hull, still others could be seen peering out. What they were doing Hargraves could not discern.

"Odd," said Usher beside him.

"What is?"

"It's odd that they should still seem to be human in form," the archeologist answered. "Ah. Perhaps there is the reason."

Both locks were open. The thing that looked like Hal Sarkoff had just emerged from the nearest one. He went directly to the main group. They were erecting something that looked like a tripod. Several were carrying pieces of metal from the ship which they were fastening together to form the legs of the tripod. At the apex of the tripod something that looked like a box was coming into existence.

"They are completely unarmed," Hargraves heard Nielson say. "There isn't a weapon in the whole damned bunch. We'll blast them senseless before they even know they're being attacked."

"If they don't succeed in manning the negatron," Usher pointed out.

"They don't know how to operate the negatron."

"Don't they? I might mention that they seem to know everything that Sarkoff knew. And Hal certainly knew how that negatron operated. He could take it apart and put it back together blind-folded."

"That's so," Nielson admitted. For a second unease showed on his lean face. "Well, that only means we will have to lick them before they can get that negatron into operation. One thing is certain—we have to have the ship."

"You're right on that score," Usher grimly said.

Seconds ticked away into minutes. The group busy about the ship had no intimation they were about to be attacked. They were careless to the point

of foolhardiness. No sentries had been posted, no effort had been made to hide the vessel.

"What are they, really?" Hargraves thought. He wondered if they were some strange form of water-dwelling life that lived in the lakes of this planet. Perhaps that was what they were! Perhaps the transition from the fish to the mammal had never been made on this planet, the fish-form developing keen intelligence. Certainly there was intelligence on this world. But it seemed to be an intelligence humans could not comprehend.

THE signal for the attack sounded. Fierce shouts came from the other side of the ship. The shouters were hidden, but there was no mistaking the sounds. They came from human throats.

"Give 'em hell, boys!"

"Tear 'em to pieces!"

The harsh throbbing of vibration pistols split the quiet air.

"Steady!" Nielson said. "Wait until they go to see what's happening."

The group busy around the ship raised startled faces from their task. They seemed to listen. Then they turned and ran around the bow of the vessel.

"Come on!" cried Nielson, leaping from concealment.

There wasn't a person left in sight to oppose them. Fifty yards to cross. Fifty yards to the ship! Fifty yards to a fighting chance for life!

Under their racing feet the soft turf was soundless.

Twenty-five yards to go now. Ten yards. Ten feet to the open lock.

Thulon appeared in the lock. He looked in surprise at the charging men.

Except for the rough staff that he carried he was weaponless.

Nielson didn't give the command to fire, didn't need to give it. Every vibration pistol had been drawn long before the men leaped from cover. Every pistol came up at the same instant, every index finger squeezed a trigger.

Only Thulon stood between them and a fighting chance for life. They came of warrior races, these men. No bugles urged them on. They needed no bugles.

A howling vortex of radiation smashed at the figure in the lock.

One vibration pistol would destroy a man, smash him to bloody bits. More than a dozen pistols were centered on the figure standing before them.

Thulon stood unharmed.

Staff in front of him he stood facing the fingers of hell reaching for him. The flaming fingers grasped, and did not touch him.

The shooting stopped as abruptly as it began. The charge stopped. Hargraves saw Nielson staring dazedly from the figure in the lock to the pistol in his hand as if the two were irreconcilable. The pistol ought to have destroyed Thulon. It hadn't destroyed him. For a mad moment, Hargraves felt sorry for the new captain. He, too, had run headlong into a logical impossibility.

All sounds were suddenly stilled, all shouting stopped, all noises died away.

Around the bow of the ship Hal Sarkoff came running. He saw the group and looked bewildered. "Hey! How did you guys get here?"

"Blast him!" Nielson said, centering his pistol on this new target.

From the staff in Thulon's hand came a soft tinkle, a bell-like sound. Nothing seemed to happen but Nielson staggered as if he had been hit a sharp blow. The pistol flew out of his hand and landed twenty feet away.

"LISTEN, you apes," Sarkoff shouted at the top of his voice.

"I'm Hal Sarkoff. I've always been Hal Sarkoff. I'll never be anybody else but Hal Sarkoff. Do you get it?"

They didn't get it.

"If you—" Nielson whispered. "If you are really Sarkoff, then who—what—is he?" He pointed toward Thulon still standing in the lock.

"Him?" The grin on the craggy face belonged to Hal Sarkoff and to no one else. "Meet a god," he said.

"A god?" That was Usher speaking now, his voice a tense whisper.

Sarkoff continued grinning. "Well, he resurrected me when I was deader than hell. I guess that makes him a god."

"You—you know you were dead?"

"Yep. At least I guess I know it. The last thing I remember is trying to get back to the control panel when we got that hole knocked in the ship, so I could cut the drivers back in. After that everything gets kind of hazy. The next thing I remember is my pal here," he gestured toward Thulon, "and a lot of his buddies chirping like sparrows while they worked over me. And believe me, they were working me over plenty. I felt like I had been turned inside out, wrung out, hung out to dry, then stuffed all over again."

"But when you came back to the ship," Hargraves spoke, "you said you remembered everything that had happened, the crash of the ship, our hiding her. If you were dead, how did you learn these things?"

"He told me," Sarkoff answered, nodding toward Thulon. "He filled out my memory for me with dope he had taken from your mind while you were talking. Reading minds is one of that old boy's minor accomplishments."

"Then why didn't you tell us the truth?" Hargraves exploded. "You said you had been sent out scouting. Why didn't you tell us what had really happened?" Mentally he added, "If it happened!"

"Because you apes wouldn't have believed me!" Sarkoff answered. "To your knowledge—mine, too, until it happened—dead men don't get up out of their graves and walk. If I had told you the truth, you wouldn't have believed a word of it. If I told you something you knew wasn't true, that you had sent me out on a scouting trip, you would know I was lying, you would figure it was a trick of some kind, and you would wait around and try to discover the trick. While you were waiting around trying to catch me, I could get in some missionary work on Ron Val. I knew I could convert him, if I had a chance to talk to him. With him on my side, we could convince the rest of you. It would have worked too. All it needed was a little time for you boys to get used to the idea of a dead man coming back to life." He looked at Nielson. "Remind me to black that other eye of yours one of these days."

"What?" said Hargraves. "What's this?"

"Our pal Nielson," Sarkoff said. "If *you* think before you act, *he* acts before he thinks. You had no sooner gone chasing off to see if I was really where you had buried me, which was what I thought you would do, until Nielson comes poking into where Ron Val and I were holding a conference. Nielson had a gun. He had it out ready to use. He figured the only safe thing to do was to shoot me. So," Sarkoff shrugged, "I had to smack him. He had forced my hand."

There was a slight stir among the group. This was news to all of them.

"Is this true?" Hargraves said.

"Yes," said Nielson defiantly. "And I was right. I should have killed him. He isn't Hal Sarkoff. He isn't tell-

ing the truth about coming back to life. Sarkoff is dead."

SARKOFF glanced up at Thulon who was still standing in the lock looking down at the men before him. There was a ghost of a smile on his face.

"See!" said Sarkoff, addressing Thulon. "I told you we couldn't tell these boys anything. They have to see, they have to feel, they have to be shown."

"Well," the thought came from Thulon to everyone. "Why don't you show them?"

"Okay," Sarkoff answered. "Nevins!" he shouted. "Reese! Come out of that ship."

Nevins and Reese were the two engineers who had died with Sarkoff.

Thulon moved a little to one side. Nevins and Reese came out of the ship. They were grinning.

"Feel us!" Sarkoff shouted. "Pinch us. Cut off a slice of skin and examine it under a microscope. Make blood tests. Use X-rays. Do whatever you damned please." He shoved a brawny arm under Nielson's nose. "Here. Pinch this and see if you think it's real."

Nielson shrank away.

Nevins and Reese passed among the men, offering themselves in evidence. Startled voices called softly in answer to other startled voices. "They're real."

"This is no lie. This is the truth."

"I've known this man for years. This is Eddie Nevins."

"And this is Sam Reese."

Hargraves heard the voices, saw the conclusion they were reaching.

"One moment," he said.

The voices went into silence. Eyes turned questioningly to him.

"Even if these men are really Hal Sarkoff and Eddie Nevins and Sam Reese, if they are the companions we knew as dead who have miraculously been returned to us, there are still facts that do not fit into a logical pattern. Even here on his world the laws of logic must hold true."

Silence fell. Men looked at him and at each other. Where there had been wonder on their faces, new doubts were appearing.

"What facts, Jed?" Sarkoff questioned.

"The sphere that attacked us, that attempted to destroy us, without warning. This is a fact that does not fit."

"The sphere?" Uncertainty showed on Sarkoff's face. Then he grinned again and turned to Thulon. "You tell him about that sphere."

"Gladly," Thulon's thoughts came. "As you know, Vega has two planets. Long ago we were at war with the inhabitants of this other planet. Part of our defenses around our own planet were floating fortresses. The war is done but we have left guards in the sky to protect us if we are attacked. The sphere that attacked you was one of our automatic forts which we had left in the sky."

"Ah!" said Hargraves. The cold logic of his mind sought a pattern that would include fortresses in the sky. Presuming war between two planets, such fortresses were logical. But—"

"The construction of such a sphere indicates vast technical knowledge, tremendous workshops. I have seen no laboratories and no industrial centers that could produce such a fortress. I have, moreover, seen no civilization that will serve as a background for such construction."

HE WAITED for an answer. Usher, the archeologist, looked suddenly at him, then looked at Thulon.

"The fortresses were built long ago," Thulon said. "In those past milleniums we had industrial centers. We no longer need them and we no longer have them."

"Then there *is* another stage!" the archeologist gasped. "You are past the city stage in your evolutionary process. You are beyond the metal age. What —" Usher eagerly asked. "What comes after that?"

"We are beyond the age of cities," Thulon answered. "The next but possibly not final stage is a return to nature. We live in the groves and the fields, beside the lakes, under the trees. We need no protection from the elements because we are in unison with them. There are no enemies on this world, no dangers, almost no death. In your thinking you can only describe us as gods. Our activities are almost entirely mental. Our only concession of materialism is this." He lifted the staff. "When you fired at me, this staff canceled your beams. It would have canceled them if they had been a thousand times stronger. When one of you attempted to destroy Sarkoff, force went out from this staff, knocking the weapon from his hand. There are certain powers leashed within this staff, certain arrangements of crystals that are very nearly ultimate matter. Through this staff my will is worked. Some day," he smiled, "we will even be able to discard the staff. That is the goal of our evolution."

The thoughts went into soft silence and Thulon looked down at them. "Does that satisfy you?" His eyes went among the group, came to rest on Hargraves. "No, I see it does not. There is still one fact that you cannot fit into your pattern."

"Yes," said Hargraves. "If all that you have told us is true, why was the ship stolen?"

"Everything has to fit for you?" Sarkoff answered. "Well, that's why you are our leader. I can answer this question. I took the ship so I could have it repaired. Then, when I brought it back to you, fit to fly again, all of us would have evidence that we could not deny. You might doubt my identity, you might doubt me, but you would not doubt a ship that had been repaired. Thulon," Sarkoff ended, "will you do your stuff?"

STANDING a little apart from the rest Hargraves watched. Thulon and his comrades brought metal from the vessel. How they used the tripod he could not see but in some way they seemed to use it to melt the metal. This was magna steel. They worked it as if it were pure tin. It didn't seem to be hot but they spread sheets of it over the gaping hole in the hull. They closed the hole. He knew the ship had been repaired but still he did not move. On the ground before him was something that looked like an ant hill. He watched this, his mind reaching out and grasping a bigger problem. The ants, he could see, were swarming.

Nielson detached himself from the group at the ship and came to him.

"Jed," he said hesitatingly.

"What?"

"Jed, what Hal said about me attacking him was right. I thought—I thought he wasn't Sarkoff. I thought I was doing what was right."

"I don't doubt you," Hargraves answered. His mind was not on what Nielson was saying.

"Jed."

"Uh?"

"Jed. I—"

"What is it?"

"Jed, will you take over command again?" The words came fast. "I—"

"Huh? Take over command? Don't you like the job?"

Nielson shivered. "No. I'm not ready for it yet. Jed, will you take it over, please?"

"Huh? Oh, sure, if that is what the fellows want."

"They want it. So do I."

"Okay then." Hargraves was scarcely aware that Nielson had left. Nor did he notice Ron Val approaching.

"Jed."

"Huh?"

"Jed, I've been talking to Thulon." The astro-navigator's voice was trembling with excitement. "Jed, do you know that Thulon and his people *belong to our race?*"

"What?" the startled captain gasped. "Oh, damn it, Ron Val, you're dreaming again."

IT WOULD be a wonderful dream come true, Hargraves knew, if it was true. The human race had kin folks in the universe! Man did not stand alone. There was something breath-taking in the very thought of it.

"Thulon says the tests he ran on Hal Sarkoff proved it. He says his people sent out exploring expeditions long ago, just like we are doing, only the groups they sent out were more colonists than explorers. He says one of these groups landed on earth and that we are the descendants of that group, sons of colonists come back to the mother world after uncounted centuries of absence—"

Ron Val was babbling, the words were tumbling over each other on his lips.

"Oh, hell, Ron Val, it doesn't fit," Jed Hargraves said. "We can trace our evolutionary chain back to the fish in the seas—"

"Sure," Ron Val interrupted. "But we don't know that those fish came from the seas of earth!"

"Huh?" Hargraves gasped. "Well, I'll be damned! I never thought of that possibility." He looked at the lakes dancing in the Vegan sunshine. From these lakes, from these seas, had come the original fish-like creature that eventually became human in form! The thought was startling.

"The colonists landed on earth thousands of years ago," Ron Val said. "Maybe they smashed their ship in landing, had to learn to live off the country. Maybe they forgot who they were, in time. Jed, we have legends that we are the children of God. Maybe— Oh, Jed, Thulon says it's true."

Hargraves hesitated, torn between doubt and longing. He looked down. On the ground in front of him the ants were still swarming. Hundreds of them were coming from the ant hill and were flying off. There were thousands of them. Eventually, in the recesses of this vast grove, there would be new colonies, which would swarm in their turn. He watched them flying away. The air was bright with the glint of their wings.

He looked up. Thulon was coming toward them. Thulon was smiling. "Welcome home," his voice whispered in their minds. "Welcome home."

Hargraves began to smile.

"BATTERING" RAMS

THE bighorn sheep rams are very touchy males indeed during the mating season. And their way of showing their displeasure is also unique.

If two rams meet during this season and don't like each other's looks, they first face each other and then back up until they are about two hundred feet apart. They then run at full speed and crash head-on. The ram with the stronger skull wins, but they probably both end up with a terrific headache, which, in the victor's case, is a small price.

Brad Nelson had a perfect way to kill Big Tim without any danger of being accused. Then his foot slipped and he was hurled into an unknown world

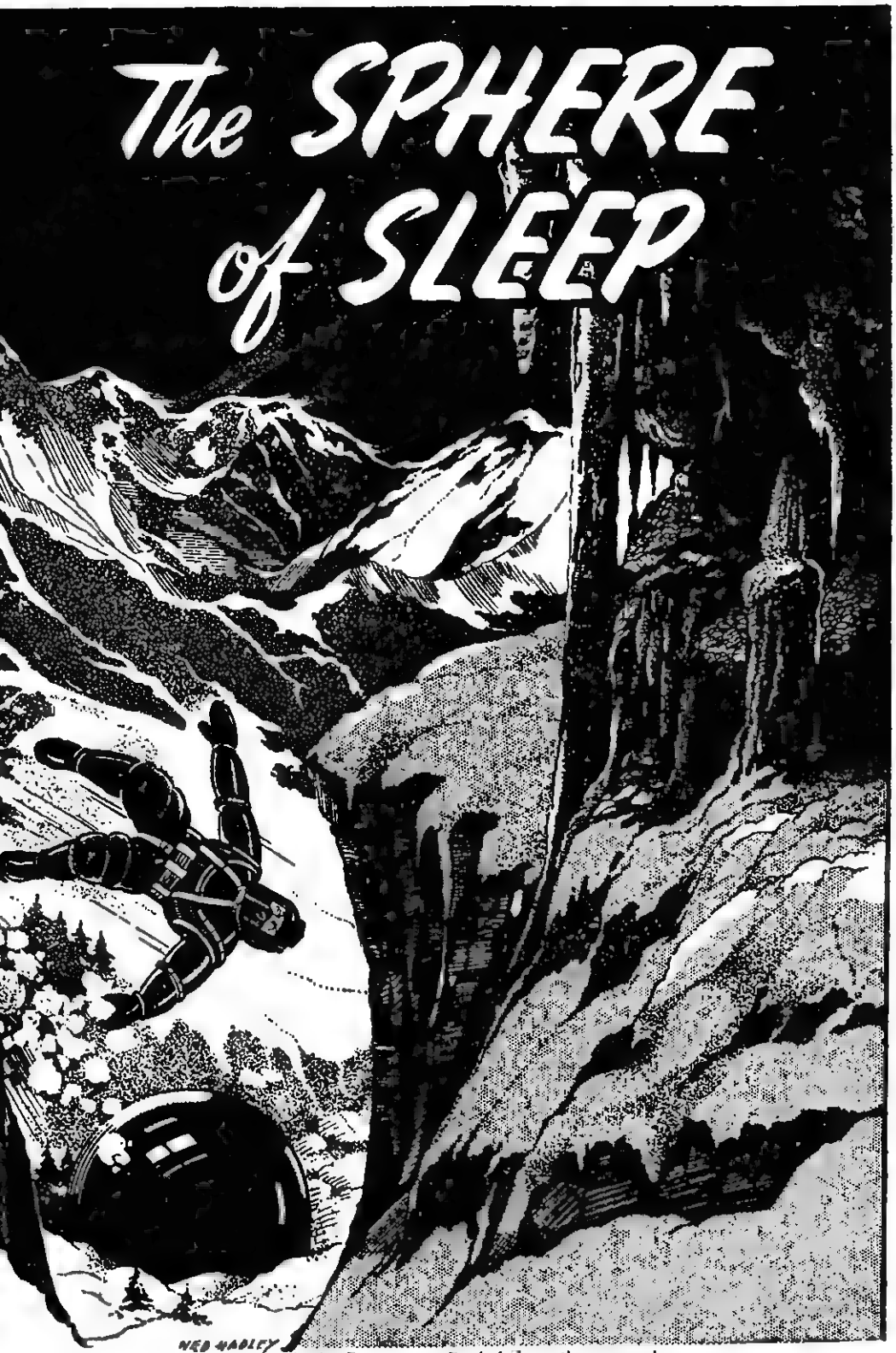
by CHESTER S. GEIER

"I'VE got to kill you, Big Tim. I've just got to kill you! I want Laura—and you're standing in my way. . . ."

The thought beat urgently and continuously in Brad Nellon's mind. He was absorbed in it to the extent that the terrible Titanian gale which roared beyond the shelter of his thermalloy suit was forgotten.

Beside him, the object of his deadly thoughts strode unknowing. His large, brown face crinkled in a grin of boyish enjoyment, Tim Austin was fighting his way through the fierce drive of wind and snow. That grin was always there. It was as much a part of him as his thick, tow hair, his gentle brown eyes and giant's frame. He was big and carefree, and life ran rich and full in his veins.

On Brad Nellon's face there was no enjoyment in the battle against the storm. There was not even his usual



Helplessly the two men hurtled down the snowy slope

resentment of the bitter cold and the thick, white snow. His grey eyes were covered with a heavy film of thought. He walked in a world where there was no storm save that of his emotions, no reality outside of the imagery constructed by his brain. His stocky, powerful form plodded along mechanically.

They moved in a world of snow and ice and screaming wind. Great pinnacles and ridges, worn into fantastic shapes by the gale, towered on every side. The curtain of snow occasionally lifted to reveal white hills marching upon white hills, huge, glittering ice sheets, yawning chasms. And sometimes, farther in the distance, there would be awesome alien vistas.

The dark thread of Brad Nellon's thoughts was broken abruptly by the sudden hum of his helmet earphones. He looked up with guilty quickness. Awareness of his companion, of the frigid hell of his Titanian surroundings, rushed back in a flood.

"On the watch, guy," the voice of Big Tim Austin cautioned. "We're almost near Tower Point."

Nellon moved his head in a jerky nod of understanding. His eyes probed momentarily into those of the other, then dropped quickly back to the snow. His earphones hummed again.

"Say, Brad, anything wrong?"

Nellon's face tautened in sudden panic. Again his eyes flashed to Austin. But he did not find in them the suspicion which he expected. There was only solicitous wonder.

"I'm all right," Nellon answered. "Just a bit tired, that's all." He realized that his voice sounded hoarse and unnatural. With masked gaze, he tried to learn its effect upon Austin.

BUT it was the content of his voice, not its tone which had registered upon Big Tim. Nellon was startled by the unexpected flood of vehemence which poured in through his earphones.

"That's the result of short rations, damn it! I knew it would get us sooner or later. We should've been on our way home long ago. The whole expedition has been a mess from beginning to end.

"You shouldn't have come with me, Brad, when I volunteered to go after old Ryska's stuff. But I thought it would be all right, because we're the only real he men among all those runty scientists. They're good for nothing but theory-spinning. They've thrown the expedition off schedule with their mental butterfly chasing, and got the rest of us down on short rations. And now, just as we're ready to leave at last, one of them has to remember that he left a pile of valuable equipment lying around somewhere in the snow."

Austin was silent a while. When he spoke again, the old laughter-lights were back twinkling in his eyes.

"Oh, hell, Brad. I guess I'm just sore because I'm being kept away from Laura every second the brain-gang holds us back. I can't wait to see her again."

"Yes, I know how it is," Nellon muttered.

"Swell kid, isn't she?"

"Yes." Nellon forced out the answer with difficulty.

"Well, keep your eyes peeled for Tower Point up there. As soon as we've got old Ryska's junk, we'll all be heading for home."

Nellon felt a weary sort of satisfaction. No, Big Tim didn't suspect. Big Tim didn't know that he was never going home again. Nellon had accompanied him on this final little trip to make sure of that.

They were nearing the lower end of a long ravine. Here, the invisible

trail which they followed rose steeply and entered a narrow cleft between two huge slabs of ice. Then it dipped around the base of a great pinnacle, which thrust like an undaunted finger into the rage of the storm. This was the unique landmark which the expedition members had christened Tower Point.

Tower Point served as a great, white warning signal. For the trail skirting it gave way abruptly from powdery snow to ice of mirror slickness and slanted down sharply to a frozen lake which, unsheltered from the terrible wind, was polished constantly. One end of the lake had once been a falls, for here it ended, dropping down as sheerly as a precipice for hundreds of feet.

The way around Tower Point was one of the chief dangers, for there was no telling where the snow ended and the ice began. A sudden slip meant a swift slide down and onto the frozen surface of the lake. There, where the wind swept in all its unbroken force, one would be blown helplessly over the icy edge of the falls and dashed to death on the jagged ice teeth far below. Dick Fulsom, metallurgist, had already lost his life that way.

And that was the way Nellon had planned Big Tim Austin would die. Tower Point would mark the scene of another tragedy. Just the merest of shoves on that deadly borderline between ice and snow, and Big Tim would go flashing down to the lake and over the falls.

IT was as simple as that. Nellon knew that nothing could ever be proved against him. Nor would the faintest thought of suspicion ever enter the minds of the others. For to them he and Big Tim had always been pals in the truest, deepest sense of the word.

No, he had nothing to fear. The only reckoning would be with his conscience, but he did not allow that to trouble him now, for all he wanted to think of was Laura. Laura would be his. He knew that with a grim, satisfying certainty.

Now they were starting up the difficult rise which led to Tower Point. Nellon slipped gradually behind, until he walked in Austin's rear. His eyes settled and fixed to the metal back of the other's suit.

Very soon, now, it would be over. And then he would be on his way back home to Earth. Laura would be there on Earth, waiting. Laura.

Laura had silky chestnut hair that glinted with deep, red lights and fell in thick curls to her shoulders. Her eyes were very brown and level and filled with dancing motes of laughter. Her nose was short and pert, and he remembered the tiny mole which lay like a speck of soot just near the left nostril. Her lips were a little too wide, but they were firm and full and could quirk up in a smile that was rich and warming. Her body was small and sweet in the gentle swelling of its curves.

But it was her smile which Nellon thought of now. A bitter pain shot through him as he recalled it. Though in his thoughts it was all for him, he knew that its actual warmth was shed upon Tim Austin. Big Tim, who was so large and happy and tousled that he looked like an overgrown boy.

It was together that they had met Laura. And it was together that they had dated her. But as the three-sided friendship deepened, the inevitable change had occurred.

Strangely enough, it had been Nellon himself who brought it about. It had happened the evening he had had Laura with him alone for the first time. The spell of her charm had been concen-

trated upon him alone, and he had lost his head to such an extent that he proposed.

Laura had said no, and things had never been the same between them again. Though Big Tim may have wondered at times, he hadn't been sensitive enough to realize the change. Nellon had, in fact, concealed his pain and desire so effectively that Big Tim had never awakened to the truth.

NELLON remembered almost the exact words Laura used that evening. Even now the tones of her voice rang in his ears, gentle and sad.

"I'm sorry, Brad," she had said. "Please try to understand. I really do like you—an awful lot. You're like a rock, solid and strong, something to cling to. But Tim is like a big, clumsy playful dog—so terribly lovable. I can't help it. Really, Brad, if it wasn't for Tim, I'd never hesitate to marry you."

For two and a half years her words had drummed in his mind. "If it wasn't for Tim—"

At first he had tried to ignore the early thoughts of murder which had crept insidiously into his brain. But they persisted, grew stronger, and before long he had been making actual plans. Several times the cold hand of death had reached for Tim Austin, but each time Nellon's instincts had revolted and the thing had remained undone.

But now the members of the expedition were preparing to return home to Earth. Nellon knew that if Big Tim reached Earth alive the Laura he remembered and wanted would be lost to him forever. If Big Tim was to die, it would have to be done before the ship left, for once sealed within its confines, the risks would be too overwhelmingly large.

It had been old Sigmund Ryska who had presented Nellon with what he had realized was his final and only chance. Old Ryska had left several pieces of valuable scientific equipment lying in a small hut which he had set up for some experiments. He had remembered them at the last moment. Someone had to fetch them before leaving, and Big Tim Austin had volunteered. Nellon, because of the purpose which motivated him, had gone along.

He had made up his mind at last. This time he would allow no scruples to stay his hand. This time Big Tim would die.

THEY had reached Tower Point. Nellon's breathing had quickened, and a fine perspiration had broken out upon his face. Fine lines were etched around his eyes and mouth.

Nellon and Austin stood side by side a moment upon the summit which was crowned by the great pinnacle of Tower Point. Down below glittered the surface of the frozen lake. White and desolate, the frozen wastes of Titan tumbled and leaped on every side. Snow swirled about them, whipped into angry life by the gale.

Austin turned.

"Well, down we go. Watch it, guy." For a second his eyes locked with Nellon's. A frown of perplexity and concern narrowed them.

"Brad—anything wrong? You don't look right, somehow."

Nellon felt himself go icy cold. Words of hoarse denial tumbled to his lips.

"No—it's nothing. I—I'm all right."

But Big Tim was not assured.

"Listen, Brad, Ryska's hut isn't much further, now. You'd better wait here, and I'll go on ahead and get the stuff. It's hard and dangerous going, and if you aren't well—"

"I tell you I'm all right!" Nellon blurted. He was hot now with a fever-

ish warmth that made the perspiration which covered his body feel clammily cold. The old fear of murder was gone. Nellon knew only a burning desire to get the thing done, a wild alarm that his opportunity would vanish before he got the chance.

Big Tim shrugged.

"Come on, then. But watch it, guy, and sing out if you need me." With a last troubled glance at Nellon, he turned to the downward sloping trail and began the descent. He moved slowly and carefully, testing each foot of the way with a ponderous, insulated boot for the sudden slickness that would announce the dangerous ice.

Nellon was swept with relief. His blood rushed through his veins in a sudden fierce singing. Now, now! The broad, metal back of Big Tim's suit spread before him. Far down below the gleaming ice waited.

Nellon took swift steps forward, his arms coming up. The rushing in his ears leaped to a high pitch. He sucked in a breath, held it. Then—

Nellon slipped. It must have been a small patch of ice undetected by Austin. But Nellon slipped, lost balance, crashed into the other. Together they went whizzing down the trail toward the frozen lake. It was a long slide, but incredibly swift, and confusion and surprise made it seem all the shorter. What happened took place too quickly for thought to follow or prevent.

THEY caromed onto the ice of the lake. With a gleeful, demoniac howl, the terrible wind swooped down upon them, swept them with increased speed toward the edge of the falls. Though still half stunned by the sudden catastrophe, they reacted with the instinct of long conditioning, tried frantically to retard their swift flight over the ice. But it was futile. Their gouging metal fingers could find no purchase in the glassy smoothness over which they sped. And before friction could slow them even the merest of trifles, they were swept over the edge of the falls.

They went over, but not down upon the jagged ice teeth bared hungrily below. Nellon's attempted shove had given them both an added impetus, and they had shot over the ice at an angle which landed them upon the snow banked on the farther side of the gorge.

In that far distant day when the heat of Saturn had been great enough to cloak its satellites in warmth, the gnawing of the falls had worn steep sides in the gorge. And though the snow upon which the two men had fallen was thick and soft, it was not enough to hold them, and they went rolling end over end, in great clouds of powdery white, to stop only when they had reached the bottom.

For long moments they lay still. A thick pall of settling snow hung on the frigid air. The wind seized portions of this and sent them whirling and twisting in fantastic gyrations.

The thermalloy suits were essentially compact, mobile shelters, and had been designed more for protection against inimical extra-terrestrial elements rather than for comfort. Brad Nellon had been bruised and shaken until it seemed that his body was one throbbing ache. His senses whirled giddily in a black mist shot through with flames of pulsing red.

Of a sudden the pain leaped to intolerable heights. His battered muscles screamed an anguished protest along his nerves. Then the pain was gone, and momentarily the blackness closed in again. But something like a fresh wind sprang up, and sent the engulfing fog thinning away. Nellon's brain cleared. He opened his eyes.

He looked into Big Tim's face. Big

Tim was bending over him, worried and anxious. Nellon began to understand.

Big Tim had recovered first from the plunge. He had propped Nellon up, then turned the valve which increased the flow of oxygen inside his suit. They were alive. Nellon felt a dull wonder at it.

"Brad—all right?" It was Big Tim, his voice strained and hoarse.

Nellon nodded mechanically.

"All right."

"What happened, Brad?"

Nellon looked away. He looked up the gorge, at the tip of Tower Point. He licked his lips.

"I—I don't know. Didn't feel well—slipped on a patch of ice."

Big Tim shook his head.

"I told you to stay up there, didn't I? I knew you were in no condition to make the descent, but you were just stubborn enough to do so. It's lucky we didn't get our necks broken." He looked down and across to where, directly under the falls, the ice fangs jutted, cruel and gleaming.

NELLON was fully recovered now. He followed the direction of Austin's gaze, and though his eyes saw the same thing, his mind pictured it in a different way.

Those ice teeth should have meant Big Tim's death. He, Nellon, had failed, had narrowly escaped losing his own life because of his blunder. Intent upon the shove which was to have sent Tim Austin hurtling to his death, he had forgotten the snow-concealed ice in the trail, as lethal with hidden treachery as a patch of quick-sand.

But he was still alive. They hadn't, as yet, even reached Ryska's hut, and Nellon knew another chance would present itself. He considered this with a curious mixture of impatience and reluctance.

"If it wasn't for Big Tim—" Nellon was hearing Laura say the words again, and once again the realms of unutterable bliss he read into them strengthened his resolve. One more chance—and this time he would not fail or waver.

"Brad—look!"

Vibrant with surprise and urgency, the words ripped aside the veil of Nellon's thoughts. His head jerked up.

Big Tim was on his feet. He was pointing up at the steep bank of the gorge down which they had tumbled.

Most of the disturbed snow had settled and the wind had carried away the rest. Nellon could see quite clearly.

There up on the bank, a small snow slide had taken place. And now, against the unbroken monotony of white, something gelamed in vivid contrast.

Nellon squinted. Gradually he began to make out details. The strange surface revealed by the slide seemed to have the mellow hue of bronze, but Nellon could not be sure, since it was queerly dappled and flecked with tones of gold and red. He thought it must be from the strain on his eyes, and closed them momentarily. But when he looked again the colors were as weird as he had last seen them. This time, however, he made out a detail which he had missed previously. The surface seemed to be crossed by a black line or stripe.

"Now what in the world can that be?" Tim Austin's voice was wondering, vaguely troubled. "It's like no sample of rock or soil we've taken. Metal—that's what it is!" he exclaimed of a sudden. "It's an exposed vein of some metal. Come on, Brad, let's have a look at it."

Nellon got to his feet, his eyes fixed upon that uncanny patch of something which stood out against the surrounding whiteness like a smear of blood.

Big Tim was already started up the

bank. Nellon sucked in a breath and followed after him.

THE climb was a hard and difficult one, and their recent physical jarring caused by the fall made it all the harder. But curiosity pulled them on like a vast magnet. In the exertion they forgot their aches and bruises. Slipping and sliding, clutching for handholds, floundering in loose drifts which filled pockets of hardened crust, they made their way slowly but surely up the bank.

Finally they stood before that strangely mottled patch of red and brown and gold. The mood of awed wonder which gripped them at once heightened and deepened.

"It *is* metal!" Tim Austin breathed. "But—but, Brad, it's not a vein. It's—"

"It's a door!" Nellon finished hoarsely.

It was a door, a metal door in the snow covered bank of a falls that had, in some long, long ago, solidified to ice. A door to what? Where did it lead? What would be on the other side of it? What could be on the other side of a metal door on a world where it was doubtful that living beings had ever existed at all?

There was a rasp in Nellon's earphones. And then Big Tim Austin's voice followed it.

"Brad—I'm going in. This—why, this is the biggest find of the whole expedition!"

"It might be dangerous," Nellon pointed out, before he could become aware of the wealth of irony which lay behind the words. "We don't know what sort of life—"

"But this door has been hidden under snow for the Lord only knows how many years, Brad. Look where the crust had split here. It's thick, thick. Nothing has gone in or out for a hell of a long time. If there were beings, they're either gone or dead."

And, as if having satisfied himself on this last account, Big Tim stepped directly up to the door. He was a tall man, yet he seemed dwarfed beside it. And it was obviously very massive, for it was partly open and the width of the edge revealed could not have been spanned by the long, flexible metal fingers of their protecting gloves. The opening was a mere crack, as if someone had once made it so for a cautious glimpse of the world outside and never closed it again.

Big Tim placed his gloves against the projecting edge.

"Give me a hand, Brad. We'll see if we can open it further."

Together, they shoved. They drew upon ebbing reserves of strength, but what energy they managed to summon they threw into a brief, terrific effort to move the portal. But it did not move. Their combined strength seemed pitifully small against the weight they sought to budge.

They were about to relax their efforts in despair when, suddenly, transmitted from the metal of the door to that of their gloved hands, they felt what seemed to be a coughing whir. The sound smoothed out, deepened, and became a steady hum.

Startled, they leaped away. Their faces took on an intent, incredulous expression.

The door was opening. Slowly, majestically, it was swinging wide.

NO FORCE that they could see was behind it. The door seemed to move of its own volition. They stood as still as a pair of weird, metal statues, watching. Every sense, keyed to its highest, was directed at the widening gap.

At last all movement ceased, and the

door hung wide. The humming note which had accompanied its opening dwindled to a whisper and died away. Revealed was a tunnel of utter blackness.

Tim Austin released his breath. The sound roused Nellon from the trance which gripped him.

"It's probably controlled by an automatic mechanism. When we shoved against it, we must have set that mechanism in motion."

"I'm going in, Brad," Big Tim said suddenly. "I'm going to see what's inside." He strode impulsively to the door. But at the threshold he stopped and turned and looked at Nellon.

Nellon smiled faintly and nodded. He strode after Big Tim. Together they entered the doorway.

Lights, built into the helmets of their suits, but up to this time unused, were turned on to illuminate the way. The tunnel, they saw, was a rectangular corridor or passageway. It was lined with the same metal as that of the door.

At two intervals down the corridor they found it necessary to squeeze through half-opened doorways. The doors here were of the slide type and seemed to be controlled by machinery as was the one which they had opened to gain entrance to the corridor. But these could not be moved, nor did their efforts awaken any hum of machinery.

"You know," Big Tim remarked, "this arrangement of doors sort of reminds me of an airlock."

"I've noticed the same thing," Nellon responded. "But an airlock—" He shook his head, for this was one of the many things he couldn't understand.

Soon the corridor came to an end. Nellon and Austin found themselves in a small, square room, each side of which was lined with small glass cubicles or cabinets. In each reposed a transparent sphere with various inexplicable attachments and a compactly folded mass of some strange material.

"Helmets!" Big Tim breathed. "Brad, those are helmets. And unless I'm mistaken the other stuff must be suits of some kind. What have we stumbled onto, anyway?"

Nellon passed a slow, almost-knowing glance about the room, his helmet lights glinting on the glass of the cabinets.

"I've got a crazy idea," he said. "But let that wait until we see more. There's another doorway over there. Let's go on."

THEY went on. There were more corridors, but this time there were rooms opening from them. Each was uniformly alike, filled with the same articles and furnishings. Nothing with which they were familiar had any counterpart here. Everything, from strange, rounded furniture to bizarre clothing, was weirdly alien.

But of the beings who had once inhabited these rooms they found no trace. There were only the garments they had once worn, the chairs in which they had sat. About these clung the ghosts of their presences. Over all was an air of desertion and long neglect.

They entered another section. Here there were rooms as large as halls, spread with queer tables and chairs. One they found to be a library, for on shelves they found large, tablet-like books whose stiff pages were covered with glowing heiroglyphs.

Then they found their first stairway, a succession of small ramps leading to some floor above. They ascended slowly, with the feelings of men entering some new portion of strange and utterly alien world.

Here they found but one, huge room, and this their lights revealed to be perfectly circular. In the center, glow-

ing greenly, was what appeared to be an immensely thick column, rising from floor to ceiling. About this banks of strange instruments and machinery were grouped.

"Brad," Big Tim whispered. "This place— What on earth could it have been for?"

Nellon made small, slow shakes of his head.

"That's what bothers me. I can't imagine any possible use. They knew utility, the beings who built these rooms. There was a good purpose for this room, I'm sure. Yet I can't imagine what it could have been. None of the activities which we normally carry on in life would seem to fit in with these surroundings."

"Brad—that's it! This room was for no normal use. It was for something—oh, I don't know. But it must have been something tremendously important to them. I feel—" Big Tim did not finish. His strained, low voice died away, and he moistened his lips. The reverie heavy upon his face showed clearly how oblivious he was of the act.

"Let's take a closer look at that column, or whatever it is," Nellon suggested. "We might find a clue."

THE column was big. Just how big they had never realized. It was only when halfway to it, and still approaching, that awareness of its size began to dawn upon them.

The vastness of the room had dwarfed it somewhat, but now, almost upon it and with their own sizes as standards of comparison, they were amazed and awed at its cyclopean girth. Slow understanding of the heroic dimensions of the place in its mysterious entirety began to dawn upon them.

And then Nellon became conscious of something else besides size. With closer and closer approach to the column, a strange comfort and well-being was growing within him. The stiff soreness of his bruises was easing. The sense of restless confinment which he always associated with the wearing of his thermalloy suit was dimming. The first pangs of rising hunger of which he had earlier become aware were now dulling, as though he were in the midst of a bountiful and delicious meal. He experienced a rising tide of physical and mental satisfaction, as if every want of these two components were being realized and generously administered to.

Momentarily, he though of Laura and, because it had grown to be synonymous with her, the murder of Big Tim. His mental picture of the girl had never been more beautiful, desirable, or appealing. Every quality which she had ever possessed, real in actuality or imaginary as a result of his idealizations, was now transcended beyond all mortal planes. She became the very embodiment of every human aspiration and desire.

Surely, he found himself reasoning with that curious pleasure and contentment which had come over him, the murder of Big Tim for so glorious and wonderful a girl could be no base act. And the scruples which had forever risen to bar him mockingly from the actual deed, were now so smoothed away that he would never have known he had had them. Big Tim would die, of course. And he would take great pleasure in killing him. There would be no regrets, no self-accusations, no torturing pangs of conscience. There would only be complete satisfaction, comfort, and happiness. And Laura would be his. There was no doubt about that. There was no doubt anywhere in his mind. There was only complete gratification of every whim-

sical and vagrant thought or desire.

Then a sudden jar shook him. For a moment he had the sensation of struggling up from warm, drowsy depths. And then, suddenly, he was looking into Big Tim Austin's puzzled and incredulous face, and that eery mental surcease was gone.

"Brad—did you feel it, too?"

Nellon nodded wordlessly. He was a little frightened of the weird force that had held them both in thrall. A glance at the column looming gigantically before him showed that he and Big Tim had walked a good distance without any conscious knowledge of having done so. It was the chance collision which had aroused them both from their sleep-walking state.

NELLON could feel the force yet, brushing at the fringes of his mind with warm, soothing fingers. But he soon found that, with active resistance, there was no fear of it overcoming him again. One thing persisted, however, and that was the curiously refreshed and stimulated condition of his body. Nor was he anxious that this should go away.

They were within yards of the great column, now, and at an ever shortening range their eyes began to make out certain details which they had missed during their progress under that inexplicable half-trance.

It was not actually a column, they realized, for it was hollow and they could dimly make out the shapes of objects within. It was a vast, room-like cylinder or enclosure, with walls of transparent green. In the center, and midway between floor and ceiling, there hung what seemed to be a ball of vivid green fire.

Upon reaching the cylinder, they pressed closely to its hard surface and peered intently within. But at first the great, flaming ball obscured such early details as they could discern. It was like looking upward through water at the blinding disc of the sun. Then, as their eyes grew accustomed to the emerald brilliance, they found themselves gazing at an unbelievable scene.

High above floated the fiery, green ball. Directly below it glittered the complex mass of a great machine. This was spread upon a huge base and narrowed as it rose. Circling the apex were a multitude of rod-like projections, the ends of which terminated in large crystal cones. The bases of these were pointed upward, and from each a pale, almost invisible, beam shot up and into the green ball, as though as once nourishing and supporting it.

But it was not this which held the incredulous fixity of their gaze. For arranged in concentric circles about the machine were hundreds of tables or low platforms and upon each a still figure lay. The nearest table was some distance from the wall through which Nellon and Austin peered, and this, added to the weird, green light of the globe, made a clear delineation of physical characteristics impossible. Yet they were able to make out enough to become convinced, that, as their earlier examination of the clothing in the rooms had suggested, the figures were hauntingly human.

FOR a long moment they stood there. Then Big Tim turned, and Nellon, looking around in response to the action, was amazed at the bright and feverish gleam in the other's eyes. Words tumbled from Big Tim's lips in a hoarse rush.

"Brad, this is going to make interplanetary history. It's the biggest thing since the discovery of the first dead city on Mars. We've got to go back to the ship and bring the others. They've

got to see this. But, Brad, before they do, I'm going in there. I want to be the first to see what these people looked like. There must be a door somewhere—"

And before Nellon could voice the protest which rose to his lips, Big Tim had started away on an eager circuit of the green wall. Nellon stood looking after him in indecision, torn between conflicting impulses. Then he tightened his lips and followed in the direction which Big Tim had taken. But before Nellon could reach him, the other's excited voice crashed in his earphones.

"I've found it, Brad! There *is* a door here."

Nellon jerked into a run. He found Big Tim standing upon a short ramp before a section of the wall which was different from the rest. It was a dark area, rectangular in shape. At one side, seen dimly through the strange green substance, was an arrangement of rods and gears which was obviously an operating mechanism. Protruding from a slot in the wall, and clearly connected with the mechanism, was a short lever.

Big Tim's blue eyes glittered with daring. His tow hair awry, he looked more than ever the picture of an overgrown, impulsive boy.

"Good heavens, guy, you surely don't intend to go in there!" Nellon exclaimed. "We don't know what sort of—"

Big Tim gave a short, excited laugh. "Look—there's nothing to be afraid of. There's just that green light up there and the people, and they are dead. Everything in this place is dead. Brad, this is the chance of a lifetime. We'll be the first to look upon the faces of an extra-terrestrial race since the Martians."

Big Tim pulled the opening lever. There was a moment of appalled and complete quiet. Then hidden motors hummed into alien life, and slowly the door before them slid aside. Undimmed now by its confining walls, the green radiance poured through the opening in a blinding flood.

"Come on," Big Tim urged. And without any hesitation on his own part, he stepped through, to be bathed instantly in the emerald glow.

NELLON moved to the open doorway. The emerald rays from the globe fell upon him with an almost sensible warmth. Again that weird peace and comfort was upon him, but more overpoweringly now. He felt a rising tide of drowsiness. In some strange way, he knew it would be good to allow himself to succumb to the softly-blanketing darkness which was filling his mind. It would be a blessed surcease from all the troubles and cares of his present world. But something held him back.

And though a great, calm voice seemed to give him every assurance of safety, a stubborn, small one screamed him its warning. In a turmoil, he watched Big Tim stride toward the nearest of the platforms.

It became evident to Nellon almost immediately that Big Tim was never going to reach his goal. For shortly after the first several steps, the blonde giant's purposeful walk slowed to a bemused shamble. And, watching with a curiously disembodied attention, Nellon saw him waver, stop, and then collapse upon the floor, as though he had suddenly become very, very tired.

The warning voice was shrieking now. Nellon felt a swift rush of terror that ripped him free of the force which enclosed him in its lulling folds. He shot a wide-eyed glance from the gleaming, inert shape of Big Tim's suit to the globe flaming high above. He

wanted suddenly to run.

He struggled in panic against the invisible bonds of peace and comfort which were so reluctant to let him go. His determination to be free was the fierce and frenzied one of utter fear. Flailing his arms as if against some material foe, he managed to stumble down from the ramp, to one side of the doorway where the green light would not reach him.

Exhausted from the herculean struggle, he slumped to the floor. A soft, warm blackness was settling over him, and he was powerless to fend it off. But he knew that he was safe, and the satisfaction which he felt was increased by the radiation which he had absorbed, so that when he finally swooped into unconsciousness, it was amidst a thunderous, victorious singing.

NELLON'S next sensations were curious ones. He seemed to awaken in another realm. It was a vast and formless place with no distinguishable feature or color, but it was curiously sentient, pulsing with awesome possibilities.

Now, as though stirred by his reflection upon it, the nebulous stuff began to writhe. And then, taking shape from the formless jumble of thoughts in his subconscious, a dream-world began to grow. Bits were added here, others discarded there, but every compartment in the storehouse of his mind contributed something. And all assembled in accordance with the pattern Nellon had fashioned in two and a half years of brooding. Finally his dream paradise was complete to the last detail of his hopes and imaginings.

It was the world which he had built around Laura taken on an immaterial, but to him nontheless real, life. There was Laura and there was himself. And there was the complete bliss for which he had planned Big Tim's murder to achieve.

He became aware of a change. The outlines of his world were dimming, dissolving, fading. Even Laura, radiantly lovely, was beginning to blur before his eyes.

In horror he sought to clutch the evaporating structure to him and stabilize it once again. But it slipped through his fingers like an impalpable mist. Before he was fully alive to it, his dream Eden was gone, and he was back in that formless void in which he had found himself. And even that was thinning.

Nellon awoke. He looked around for Laura and that idyllic dream land in which they had loved. But only the great, green cylinder with its flaming globe and the vast room beyond met his gaze.

Nellon climbed to his feet. With the action, he became aware that he felt wonderfully refreshed and stimulated. He looked around for Big Tim, then he remembered. Avoiding the open doorway through which the rays still poured, he peered through the green wall. Big Tim was lying there on the floor within. He was very still in his thermalloy suit.

Nellon began a chain of reasoning. As it progressed, there went with it a rising tide of exultation.

As long as Big Tim remained there under the influence of the globe, he would remain unconscious, living, perhaps, a dream as real and vivid as his own had been. It would be just as though Big Tim were dead. None of the expedition members knew of the doorway through which he and Big Tim had entered. With the almost continuous storms which raged on Titan, the door would soon become covered again. Ages might pass before a chance accident revealed it once more.

He, Nellon, could go back to the ship

with a tale of how he had lost Big Tim in the bitter storm. The men might search, but he knew it would be futile.

Laura would grieve, of course, when he returned and told her the news. But he would be there to comfort her, and she would get over it. And he knew that she would marry him, with Big Tim out of the way. He could look forward to a happiness more satisfying than that of the dream.

Nellon saw his course clear. He knew just what he had to do.

FIRST he released the lever, and the door slid shut, entombing Big Tim within the great cylinder. Then he retraced his way down to the lower level and through the maze of rooms and corridors. It was not long before the snow of Titan once more keened against his suit.

He threw his weight against the great door. Only the impulse was necessary to close it, for the operating mechanism hummed into vibrant life and it swung shut where it had not been shut before—and locked! Nor would it open again.

Even if he had wanted to re-enter, that was impossible.

Nellon started back to the ship. With the curious vigor he felt, the dangers and difficulties of the return trip hardly registered upon him at all. Gone was his sullen dislike of the ever-raging storm. He plowed through it with a careless smile, fighting his way over the wild and tumbled terrain. And it was with no feeling of exhaustion at all that he finally sighted the great, toothed ice ridge which marked the site of the camp.

As Nellon shouldered through the narrow cleft which led into the protected, tiny valley, he remembered to remove the smile of eager triumph upon his face. It would not go with the story he was to tell.

But it was hardly necessary for him to make the effort. For at the sight that met his eyes, an involuntary grimace of appalled amazement flashed over his features.

Where the ship had rested there now was nothing at all, save a smooth surface of snow. And to his incredulously searching gaze, there was no indication that anything had ever been here. The little valley was virgin of any sign of human habitation. Only the bitter wind existed here, as always it had, keening along glittering ice surfaces, sporting with the snow.

NELLON felt the sudden nausea and weakness of a terrible fear. But a bit of flotsam presented itself out of the turbulence of his thoughts, and he clutched at it with the eagerness of despair.

He must, he told himself, have accidently encountered a site similar to the one in which the ship had lain. He had but to find the correct ridge and everything would be all right.

Nursing this hope, he started on a tour of the vicinity. Soon he realized, however, that there was no other ridge, and he had to face the fact that he had originally been at the real site. The only difference was that the ship was gone.

But Nellon felt that he had to make certain. Returning to the valley over which the ridge rose like a sheltering wall, he searched about in the deep snow. One of the first objects he discovered was a large, metal box. On one side were stenciled words which burned into his brain:

The Harton-Finston Institute.

He knew now beyond any lingering doubt that he was in the right place and

that the ship was gone, for it was the Institute which had sponsored the expedition. And he had seen other boxes like that piled compactly in the holds of the ship.

Nellon was stunned, crushed. But out of his despair a slow wonder rose. How long had he been unconscious there beside the great green cylinder? The degree to which the snow had blotted out the litter of the camp suggested that it must have been many months. For a moment it seemed incredible that his momentary exposure to the emerald rays of the globe could have produced such a result. Then he remembered the beings, circular row upon circular row of them, lying beneath it, and an awesome knowledge flooded over him.

Those beings were not dead. Exposed constantly to the rays of the globe, they were merely held in a state of slumber, dreaming dreams, undoubtedly, just as curiously real and poignant as his own had been. They were sleeping and dreaming, and the green globe brooded over them like some vast guardian, soothing, nourishing.

And Big Tim slept with them. When they awoke, Big Tim would wake and live again. But he, Nellon, would not live again. Suddenly his fear and hate of the storm returned in full and terrible force. Because when his batteries were exhausted, his suit would cool—and the storm would kill him. Slowly, inexorably, death would come to him. And death was a sleep from which there was no awakening . . .

(Continued from page 7)

IT LOOKS like laughing gas will soon be replaced by pentothal sodium as an anesthetic if other dentists have the success that Dr. Berton A. Olson, of Hollywood, California, claims he has when it is used to put his patients to sleep while having a tooth pulled.

The old fashioned nitrous oxide, laughing gas to you, required a face mask and often left the patient with bad after-effects. Pentothal sodium, on the other hand, is administered by an injection and leaves no symptoms of sickness in the stomach. The recovery period averages fifteen minutes. While under the anesthetic, the patient will open his mouth as instructed but will not remember having done so afterward.

WHICH would you rather give up first—your air supply, your water supply, or your food supply? Think carefully before you answer because if you are an average American adult man you could only live less than ten minutes if your air was cut off, but you could live almost eight days without water, and from fifty to eighty days without food.

THE American Foundation for the Blind in New York City has put the electric eye to good use in helping blind people to "see" their way to the foundation door.

When the blind person comes near the building, his body cuts a light beam focused on an electric eye. A photo-electric cell detects this and an electrical relay is operated to start an automatic speaker which announces in soft tones, "This is the American Foundation for the Blind." After this announcement, musical notes are sounded which guide the blind person to the door of the foundation.

DR. IRVING LANGMUIR, a Nobel prize winner and associate director of the General Electric research laboratory, has recently obtained a patent on his new method of detecting viruses and toxins that are invisible to the eye.

These poisons are, as a rule, so minute that it is quite a job to see them. Although viruses are the cause of common colds, measles, mumps, small pox, infantile paralysis, and other countless diseases, they are so small that they can pass through a glazed porcelain filter and it is almost impossible to see them even under the most powerful microscopes.

Dr. Langmuir's method involves the depositing of the suspected substance in a single layer of molecules on a slide that is conditioned by surface layers of other molecules up to a critical thickness. If the substance contains a toxic agent, absorption of a single layer of molecules of the substance will take place on the slide, and the film thickness will increase. It is possible to measure even microscopic changes in thickness by noting any change in color, and the color of the film will change as its thickness increases.

NEXT month we have a few treats in store which we've been saving up. We'll give you some hint of what's coming to you in January. First, there're some shorts that are really fine. Gerald Vance does "Larson's Luck," a short-short (which is a rarity) and Clee Garson makes more than a name for himself with "Direct Wire." This story is illustrated by Robert Fuqua with a really fine illustration. John York Cabot, who never fails to surprise us with his short stories, again rings the "unusual" bell with "Bats In The Belfry." Next comes that A. R. Steber story which was crowded out of this issue, "Moon of Double Trouble." And P. F. Costello puts in his bid for the shorter length competition with "Death Makes a Mistake." Stanton A. Coblentz (didn't we tell you we had treats!) presents "The Cosmic Deflector."

LONGER lengths are the second part of Howard Browne's Cro-Magnon serial, which builds up to a smash climax that will have you screaming for more. Robert Moore Williams presents the cover story with "The Lost Warship," which lives up to its title. A United States battleship is steaming through the Pacific when suddenly . . . well, suddenly it's tremendous, is all we can say!

DUE to many requests, we've written artist Paul and asked him to do a series of interior illustrations based on his own ideas, with the intention of allotting them to authors as a basis for a story. We believe that this will result in some of Paul's finest interior work. Artist Virgil Finlay is doing the same. As a result of H. W. McCauley's newest successes as an interior artist, you will note that we are including more of his work on our inside pages.

SPEAKING of Paul, he is beginning a new series of covers for us (back covers) which will be very popular with you, we are sure. It may be that we will alternate with Paul and Settles on the back covers, depending upon the availability of Mr. Settles, who is in great demand as a marine artist. Sometimes we wish we could reproduce one of his Navy paintings. However, we will soon begin the presentation of the "ocean vessels" of other worlds, and we think you'll get some idea of how wet painted water can be!

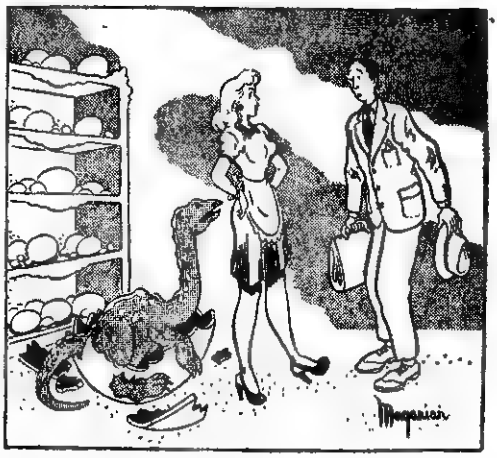
APPARENTLY we started a terrific argument when we introduced a reprint. Which is why we've held off the past few months. However, now at last we've reached a decision—and it really is *your* decision. As a result, beginning in February we will present Stanley G. Weinbaum's famous "New Adam" which was originally published in book form in a limited edition which is now out of print. We expect to publish this as a two-part serial, and we think you'll all agree that this is what you want. We are open to further suggestions as to reprints of famous science fiction novels, no matter how long ago they were written.

WE HAVE on hand a new novel by Nelson S. Bond, written especially for AMAZING STORIES. Its title is "That Worlds May Live" and it's 50,000 words of (to quote Mr. Bond himself) "space travel and yet more space travel. It goes from Earth to Venus . . . Mars . . . Jupiter . . . thence outward to the star, Sirius." That ought to make your mouths water!

INCIDENTALLY, we received a birth announcement the other day from Lancelot Biggs and wife. It seems a son has been born to the famous couple. Congrats, Lanse! Now how about a story with the youngster in it?

YOUR editor is interested in buying copies of Amazing Stories Quarterly from 1933 on (excluding the Ziff-Davis quarterlies). If any of you readers have copies on hand which you'd like to sell, write this editor and make him an offer. List the copies you have. If any avid fan has a complete collection we would appreciate an itemized list of the Quarterly issues published in 1933 to the time they were discontinued. The reason for all this—our files are incomplete.

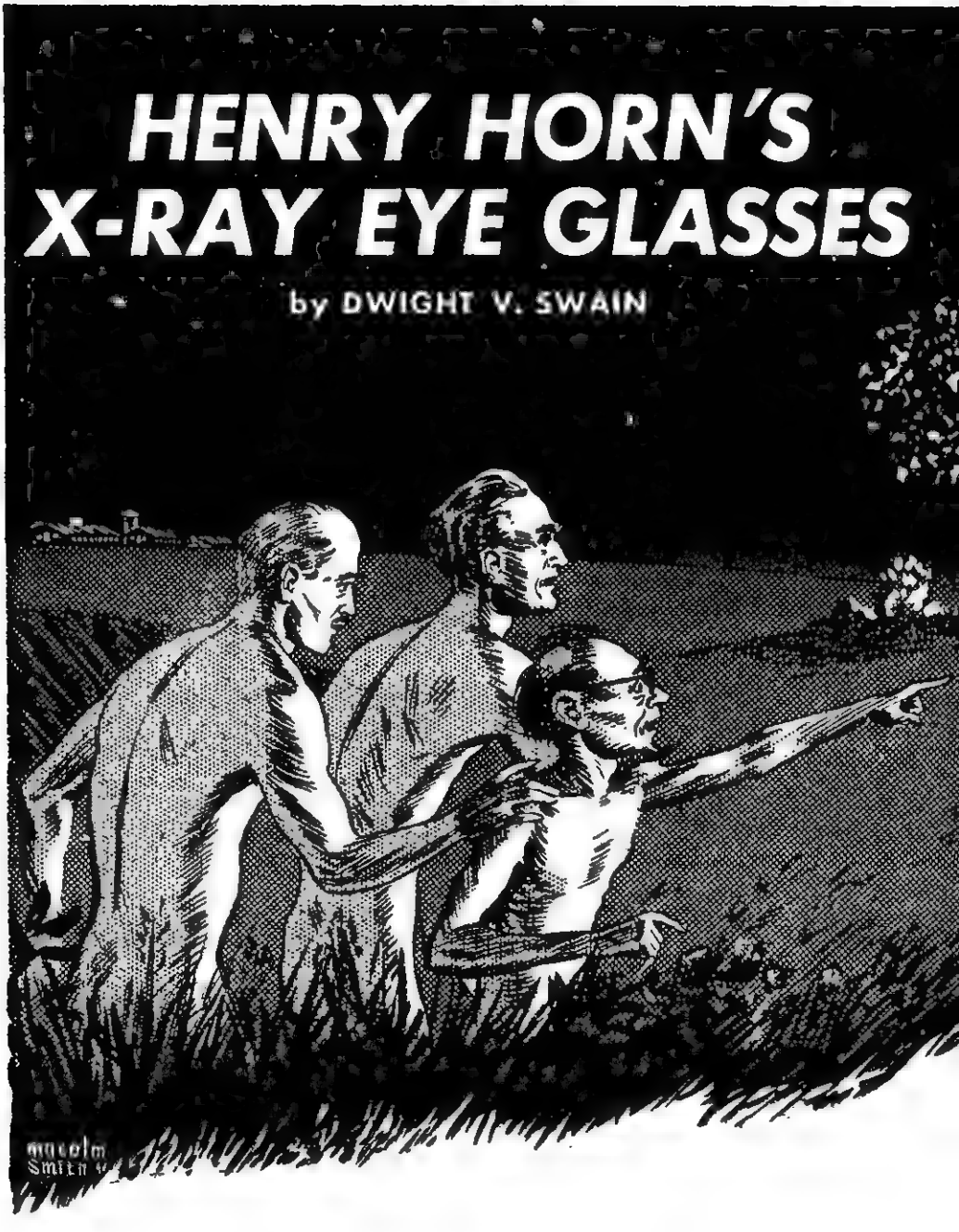
ON OCTOBER 16, the third issue of our new "big brother" *Mammoth Detective*, will be on the stands. The new addition to the family has now graduated to the bi-monthly class and will appear regularly. So you fans who welcomed the first two issues will now have a steady fare of the best detective fiction sold anywhere. If you don't believe that, read our fan mail! As one reader put it, "if it's a Ziff-Davis magazine, and edited by the same staff that puts out AMAZING STORIES, it's like buying money—you can't lose!" Which brings us to the end for this month. See you again in thirty days. *Rap.*



"You and your damned thousand-year-old eggs!"

HENRY HORN'S X-RAY EYE GLASSES

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN



Henry Horn had a new invention; a pair of glasses that worked on the x-ray principle. But he didn't expect them to reveal Nazi secret agents and their works of sabotage!

"Look!" said Henry Horn with a gasp. "Here, you look at the camp through the glasses!"

"IT'S not enough to have a nudist colony move in next door!" fumed Professor Paulsen. "No, indeed! That wouldn't disrupt things enough. Now, in addition, every ne'er-do-well in the county comes prowling over our farm in order to spy on the naked numbskulls!"

Scowling ferociously, the gaunt scientist stamped violently back across the meadow's lush verdure toward the little country home he shared with his partner, Henry Horn. Beside him, matching his own long strides, came the savant's old friend, Major Ray Coggleston of Army Intelligence.

"None of us can hope for a bed of roses all the time, Joe," Coggleston remarked, grinning at the professor's outburst. " 'Into each life some rain must fall,' you know. You've got trespassers to bother you. Me, I'm responsible for protecting one of the biggest explosives laboratories in the country against Axis espionage and sabotage."

Instinctively, as he spoke, the officer's eyes sought out the long, low Ordnance experiment station, barely a mile away. Professor Paulsen, following the glance, nodded.

"You're right," he agreed. "And when you come right down to it, my

worries over the nudist camp back there"—he jerked his head toward the high board fence which marked the boundary — "aren't very important. Not with a war in progress."

By now the two were in the yard and rounding the corner of the house.

The next instant they stopped dead in their tracks.

There, in the shade of the building, stood a slight, familiar figure. A figure which, at the moment, was the center of attention for a little knot of interested spectators.

"Oh, yes, gentlemen, it certainly does work!" cried Henry Horn enthusiastically, his scraggly goatee jerking spasmodically with each nod of emphasis. He waved the battered pair of binoculars he clutched in his right hand. "Yes, it's a marvelous invention. You can see everything you want to, just like you were right inside that camp. And only a dollar for a minute's look!"

The professor's face jumped to beet red, then apoplectic purple. His fists clenched, and the sound he made as he sucked in his breath closely resembled that of a cow pulling her foot out of a mudhole. He started forward.

Major Coggleston choked off an incipient frame-racking spasm of mirth barely in time. He caught the tall scientist's arm.

"See you later, Joe!" he snickered. "I've got to get back on duty. There's a new super-explosive being tested, and I'm supposed to be on hand."

"All right. Later." Professor Paulsen grated the words through clenched teeth, but it is doubtful that he was even conscious of speaking. His eyes were focussed straight at Henry in a horrible glare, and the smoke of indignation hovered about him in clouds.

"ONLY a dollar, gentlemen!" cried Henry, oblivious to all this new attention. "It's just like going inside the camp. Really it is!"

"He's right, boys!" broke in a burly, red-headed character. "Those glasses of his are better than a seat on the fence." And, turning to the little man: "I'll even buy 'em from you. How much'll you take?"

"You see, gentlemen?" whooped Henry, steel-rimmed spectacles nearly sliding off the end of his nose in his excitement. "The gentleman says my invention is everything I say it is—"

"Henry!"

The little man jumped as if a red-hot flatiron had just been applied to that portion of his trousers designed for sitting.

"Urghk!" he exclaimed profoundly.

"You prying Piltdown*!" flamed the professor. "Is there anything you won't do for money?" A moment of thunderous silence. "I'm surprised you're not doing a fan dance yourself, if these would-be Peeping Toms are willing to pay for nakedness."

The red-headed man guffawed.

"And you!" exploded the savant, turning on the spectators. "Get out of here! Yes, all of you, you riffraff! I won't have you on the place!"

Henry's potential customers fled before the Paulsen wrath like chaff before the wind, leaving the quaking little entrepreneur to face his fate alone. He stood braced against the verbal cloudburst, eyes squeezed tight shut behind steel-rimmed glasses, goatee sticking straight out.

"For days these snoopers have driven me half-crazy!" raged the professor. "I've tried every trick I could think of to keep them out. I've put signs forbidding trespassing on every tree. I've

* The Piltdown Man was a species of prehistoric being *(Eoanthropus dawsoni)*, long since extinct, with a retreating, apelike chin and thick cranial bones, but a human-type cranium.—Ed.

threatened mayhem and murder. Yet still they come!"

"But Joseph—"

"Keep quiet 'til I'm finished, you disgrace to science!" The lean scholar ran trembling fingers through his greying hair. Then:

"And now—today! Major Coggleston and I go down to the end of the meadow to drive three of the sneaking human dung beetles away from knotholes. When we get back, what do we find?"

"Joseph, please—"

"We find you—my colleague, my partner, my friend! You—peddling the use of your binoculars to the slimy creatures!" He glared savagely at his victim. "If you were in Paris, Henry Horn, you'd be selling French postcards to tourists!"

STILL purple with rage, the savant turned away. Stared dourly back toward the high board fence that surrounded the nudists.

The next instant he jerked as stiff as if an electric shock had jolted through him.

"Henry!"

"Yes, Joseph." The other's voice was meekly plaintive as he awaited a renewal of the diatribe.

"Henry, that fence is between us and the nudists! How could you see them, binoculars or not?"

Henry's face brightened. His goatee moved to a more confident angle.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you, Joseph," he explained. "It's my new invention—"

"Invention!" There was a hysterical note in the way Professor Paulsen exclaimed the word. "Please, Henry, not that! Don't tell me you've been inventing again—"

His little colleague bristled.

"And why shouldn't I be inventing, Joseph Paulsen?" he demanded querulously. "My inventions are mighty valuable. Why my new explosive—"*

"—Which you ran onto quite by accident, and which turned out not to be an explosive at all," the professor cut in grimly.

"Well, the government—"

"The government doesn't have to live with you. Nor to put up with your 'inventive' ways." Henry's tall partner was fierce in his vehemence. "You've cited one of your devil's devices that turned out well. Well, now let me mention a few. Remember what happened when you decided to find the universal solvent?"*

"But scientists all make mistakes sometimes, Joseph—"

"And how about that time you wiped out every peony within ten miles? Was that a mistake too?"

"Honestly, I didn't think it would kill anything but ragweed," Henry sniveled miserably.

"Of course it was all an accident when you rendered every one of our guinea pigs sterile, wasn't it?" sneered the other. "That was a nice invention, Henry. All it did was to cut off our income for months on end, and nearly destroy our reputation for reliability as breeders of laboratory guinea pigs."

"Oh, Joseph!" Henry's voice was an abject wail. His goatee hung limp and bedraggled. "You know I didn't mean any harm any of those times. Really I didn't. I just want to be a scientist—" Again he began sniveling.

Professor Paulsen, still glaring, opened his mouth to denounce his partner further. Then, thinking better of it, he relaxed and put his arm around Henry's quivering shoulders.

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* See "Henry Horn's Blitz Bomb," AMAZING STORIES, June, '42; and "Henry Horn's Super-Solvent," *Fantastic Adventures*, November, '41. —ED.

"Do you think I like to talk to you like this?" he asked, leading the way toward the porch. "*Do you think it's* pleasant for me?" Wearily, he shook his head. "I hate to be shouting at you all the time, Henry. It's just that patience will stretch only so far. Then it snaps."

A pause.

"I keep thinking you'll learn by experience, Henry. That you'll realize you can't be forever blowing the roof off the laboratory, or Lord knows what else, and quit fooling around with things you don't understand.

"But instead, you go right on. You dabble into some new branch of science, and a cloud of trouble sweeps down on us like a typhoon on Zamboanga."

TOGETHER, the friends climbed the porch steps and took seats on the ancient but comfortable wicker settee.

Henry darted a quick glance at his partner. Saw that the professor's face once more was placid; that the storm was over. Unconsciously, the little man's goatee perked up. He readjusted his steel-rimmed glasses to a more stable position.

"Honestly, Joseph, this time my invention can't do any harm," he ventured. "Really it can't."

For a moment fire flashed in the scientist's eyes. Then faded again.

"All right, Henry. What is it this time?"

Henry extended the binoculars.

"Here, Joseph. Look at the nudist camp."

"But the fence—"

"Please, Joseph. Go ahead and look."

"Oh, all right—"

The professor raised the field glasses.

The next instant he nearly dropped them.

"What on earth—!"

"See, Joseph?" shrilled Henry. "Isn't *it a wonderful invention? Isn't it?"*

His tall partner took down the binoculars and stared at them in blank amazement, his face a puzzled mask.

"I'd swear I saw right through that fence!" he gasped. "I looked right into the middle of a whole pack of nudists!"

"Of course!" Henry was bubbling with delight. "That's why I call them my X-ray eyeglasses. You can see through anything with them." He took the glasses from the professor. Again leveled them at the nudist colony.

Then, giggling:

"Doesn't that blonde girl have the cutest—"

"Henry!"

"Oh, all right." The little man returned the binoculars to his partner, who studied them with interest.

"Just what principle do these things work on, Henry?" he asked curiously.

Henry beamed. His goatee was at its jauntiest, most confident angle. The light of triumph played in his eyes.

"Really, Joseph, it's quite simple," he proclaimed. "There are lots of rays that go through anything, you know, except maybe lead. So I just developed a special glass that translated those rays into images, instead of just using the light rays. It was easy. The only thing you have to be careful of is to focus real close, because otherwise you'll look right through the thing you want to see—"

"Simple!" choked the scientist. "Easy! Henry, I hope you kept complete notes this once." He raised the glasses again. Studied a signboard on the nearby road.

"Oh, yes, I've got good notes," Joseph—"

"And you still need a concave eyepiece, so that the images won't reverse," Professor Paulsen interrupted. "The

way it works now, pictures are all right, but 'CAMELS' are spelled 'SLEMAC'."

HENRY sniffed contemptuously.

"That's nothing," he retorted. "I've got it figured out already. Only it'll take a special lens, not just a concave one. Because now it doesn't just reverse letters like a mirror; it transposes them—"

"All right, all right!" The professor threw up his hands in despair. "This is one time you've invented something worth while, and you seem to have some kind of notion of how it works, for a change."

"How you talk!" Henry was suddenly cocky. He sneered. "I always know how my inventions work—"

His gaunt friend glowered.

"I was afraid of this," he grunted. "Give you half a compliment and there's no living with you." Then: "However, I won't waste time and energy bringing you down to earth right now. The main thing is, get your notes together. I want you to show them to Major Coggleston tonight; I think maybe the army can use this invention of yours."

And, as Henry again raised the glasses in the direction of the nudist camp:

"But get rid of those glasses for now. I don't want to catch you ogling blonde beauties, or any other kind. Those people in that camp put up that fence because they wanted privacy. So put those binoculars away right now. Do you understand?"

"Oh, all right," fretted Henry. "I'll get rid of them."

Dinner was a thing of the past, and Major Coggleston, Professor Paulsen and Henry were settled comfortably on the front porch, enjoying the quiet of the summer evening.

"If these glasses of yours work as well as you say they do, the Army certainly can use them," commented the major thoughtfully. "Such an invention would completely revolutionize espionage and its counter-measures. Nothing would be safe! Why, a spy could stand half-a-mile from the laboratory I'm supposed to be protecting, look through the walls to the records room, and steal the formulae for our latest explosives right from under our noses, with none of us the wiser."

"Yes." The professor nodded. "I can see how much it would mean. That's why I had you over tonight—wanted you to have a chance to investigate." A pause. "By the way, how's the work coming at the laboratory?"

"Better than we'd hoped for, Joe. We've got a young fellow in charge who's a genius on explosives." The major hesitated for a moment, then continued: "Confidentially, I understand he's just developed a new powder that makes TNT look like something to use for loading firecrackers. It's the greatest thing in years. The Nazis and Japs would give their eye-teeth for it. It's simpler to make than gunpowder, even—"

Brrrnng!

"I'll answer," said Henry. He skittered inside to the telephone.

A minute later he was back.

"It's for you, Major Coggleston."

THE officer hurried to answer. When he returned, his face was tense with worry.

"Something's wrong!" he rapped. "It looks like the Nazis have made a play for that formula already! I've got to get right back to the laboratory!"

Henry and the professor still were excitedly discussing this news when, half an hour later, the 'phone rang again. This time the tall scientist an-

swered. He returned to the porch frowning.

"That was Coggleston," he reported. "Apparently the spy didn't get the formula, but he made a clean getaway, and he killed a sentry to do it."

"Oh, that's terrible!" Henry was afire with indignation. "Of all things! Killing a sentry—"

"Yes." The professor nodded. "The trouble is, Coggleston says they don't have much to go on. No description, except that he was big and had red hair—"

"Red hair!"

"Yes. Red hair." The savant eyed Henry suspiciously. "Why does that surprise you so?"

"Why . . . er . . . oh, it doesn't. I mean—"

"What do you mean?"

"Really, Joseph, it's nothing." The little man squirmed nervously, his goatee hanging guiltily to one side. "I'm not surprised at all. Really I'm not!"

"Oh, you're not, aren't you?" Professor Paulsen started across the room with grim determination, his eyes sharp. "Well, then—"

"Joseph—"

The scientist reached for his colleague's shoulder. But the shoulder slipped away. Henry dived frantically for the doorway.

"Oh, no, you don't!"

SPINNING about with surprising agility, the professor's hand speared out. It stabbed home to its goal on Henry's chin with deadly aim. Caught the little man's goatee in a grip that stopped his headlong rush dead still.

"Joseph!" screamed Henry, his eyes filling with tears. "Stop it! You're hurting!"

"And I intend to keep right on hurting until I get the truth out of you, you amoeba-brained atom!" thundered the other. "I can smell your lies a block away—and this is one time you're not going to get away with it! Now: tell me who the red-headed man was."

"I don't know, Joseph! Really—"

Professor Paulsen gave his colleague's chin-whiskers a savage jerk.

"I want the truth!" he rapped. "Hurry up! Tell me!" He jerked again.

"Oh! Ow! Joseph, please! Oh, let me go! I'll tell—"

"You bet you'll tell!" grated his friend. "It's one thing to let you get away with making a fool of me. But when it comes to tampering with the United States Army—" And then, breaking off: "All right. Why did you jump so when I mentioned the spy was believed to have red hair?"

"Well . . ." Henry squirmed some more. He tried hard to look dignified despite the professor's grip on his goatee, but failed miserably.

"Out with it!"

"It's really nothing, Joseph—"

"Out with it, I say!"

"Ow! Joseph, stop!" And then: "It's just . . . the man who bought my X-ray glasses had red hair—"

"The man who bought your X-ray glasses!"

"Joseph! You're hurting!"

"What do you mean, 'the man who bought your X-ray glasses'?" The professor thrust his gaunt face to within an inch of Henry's, his eyes like steel gimlets. "If you tell me you've sold those glasses, you misbegotten moron—"

"But Joseph!" Henry struggled to free himself. "You told me to get rid of them. You warned me not to use them."

"I never told you to sell them! You knew I wanted to talk to Coggleston about their use to the army—"

"Yes, but you didn't tell me *not* to sell them. And I had all my notes, and knew just how to make another pair, and so when the red-headed man offered me fifty dollars for them—"

But Professor Paulsen had ceased to listen. Already he was on the telephone and calling Major Coggleston. Tersely he explained the situation.

Then:

"Could he have gotten the formula, Ray? Was it anywhere he could see it through those devil's glasses?" And, a moment later: "Oh, Coggleston, I can't tell you how sorry I am—"

"What did he say?" Henry demanded excitedly as the other hung up. "Is it all right, Joseph—"

"No." The scientist shook his head, eyes dark with worry. "Coggleston says we can be practically certain the spy got that formula. He says the man in charge was having a staff meeting of his aides, and they had it written out on a blackboard for discussion."

"Joseph—"

"Ray's on his way over now. He wants to ask you some questions about the man's description—"

EVEN as the words left the savant's mouth, they heard a car roar up the driveway. Major Ray Coggleston hurried in the door, a sergeant at his heels. He wasted no time on preliminaries.

"What did he look like?" he demanded.

"Well, he had red hair . . ."

"Yes, yes. We know that."

"He was pretty big. Almost as tall as Joseph."

"Yes. Go on."

"I guess he talked sort of loud."

"Got it."

Henry hesitated. Tugged at his goatee, his face screwed with concentration.

"Really, Major Coggleston, that's about all I can remember about him," he said at last.

The officer swore. He paced the floor in a frenzy of anxiety.

"We've nothing to go on!" he fumed. "The description's meaningless. It could fit any one of a thousand men in this area. We don't even know where to start to hunt."

"Excuse me, major—" gulped Henry.

The military man whirled on him.

"What is it? Have you thought of something else?"

"Why, about where to start to hunt—"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you try the nudist camp?"

"The nudist camp?" Professor Paulsen exploded. "Are you completely crazy, Henry? Why would a spy be in a nudist camp?"

Henry glared back at him.

"No, I'm not completely crazy," he snapped peevishly. "And I don't know what a spy is doing in a nudist camp, but that's where he was when I sold him my glasses." He sniffed. "Really, Joseph, I get awfully tired of your acting like you were the only one around here who was half smart."

But Major Coggleston interrupted.

"Let's get this straight," he pleaded. "Where did you meet this red-headed man? How'd you come to sell him the glasses?"

"Oh, that?" Henry sniffed so hard his glasses slid down his nose. "Why, he was one of the men who was out peeking at the nudists." He turned to Professor Paulsen. "You remember, Joseph. He's the one who said I was telling the truth about my X-ray eyeglasses being able to look through the fence."

"Yes, heaven preserve me, I remember!" groaned the professor. "But why

didn't I think—"

"So he asked me to sell him my glasses," Henry continued. "And when Joseph told me to get rid of them, I took them over to the nudist camp and sold them to him for fifty dollars."

"But how'd you know he was in the nudist camp?"

"How?" Henry's goatee jerked with contempt. "How would I know anyone was there? I saw him. He was right behind the blonde with the cute—"

"Henry!"

"Oh, all right. Anyhow, he was right behind a blonde girl. I saw him when I looked through my glasses while I was showing Joseph how to use them."

AGAIN Major Coggleston paced the floor. His face was lined with worry. He bit nervously at his lip.

"I'll be damned if I know what to do!" he exploded. "I've got to find that spy. But I can hardly seize a whole nudist camp just because a red-headed man bought a pair of binoculars."

"Couldn't you ask that all red-headed men be brought to the gate?" suggested Professor Paulsen.

"No." The officer shook his head. "If the man we want is there, that would tip him off."

"Excuse me, sir," broke in the sergeant who accompanied Major Coggleston, "but why not just search the whole place with the men you've got detailed for guard duty? It wouldn't be much of a job."

The major nodded.

"If I have to, that's just what I plan," he replied. "However, there are women in that camp. Nude women. And, frankly, I don't hanker after any of the kind of publicity which undoubtedly would result from such a search. So I want to avoid it if I can."

"Then what—"

"I'll go in alone! That's it!" Major Coggleston straightened, suddenly decisive. "Sergeant, go back to the laboratory and round up all but a skeleton guard. Bring them back to the nudist camp and surround it. Don't let anyone escape! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir. I am to surround the nudist camp with our men as soon as possible, leaving only a skeleton guard on the laboratory."

"Right. On your way."

The sergeant strode out, and a moment later the car in the driveway roared to life. And back in the house, the major drew a deep breath.

"Well, I'm off!" he snapped. "Wish me luck!"

"Wait!" bleated Henry, his goatee waggling excitedly.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm going with you!"

"You?" Major Coggleston stared. "What for?"

Henry started in indignation at the other's tone. He drew himself to his full height and thrust his chin out aggressively.

"'What for?'" he mimicked. "Hmmph! Let me ask you a question, Mister Officer: how are you going to identify the man who bought my glasses if I'm not along?"

The major considered this. Then, at last:

"All right. I guess you'll have to come."

"Then so do I."

It was Professor Paulsen.

"Joe, there's no need to talk like that," Major Ray Coggleston began.

"If Henry goes, I go," the savant reiterated stubbornly. "He gets in enough jams with me around to look after him. Lord knows what he'd do if he got away from me."

AND so it was, ten minutes later, that the three appeared at the main gate

of the Sunset Glow Nudist Colony: Let Old Sol Bring You Health. From within the fenced enclosure came the glow of firelight and the sound of festivities. A burly short-clad gateman was on duty.

"Well?" he demanded.

Major Coggleston displayed his credentials.

"You've got a man in there whom we suspect of being a spy," he explained. "We've got to come in and investigate."

The gateman hesitated and chewed his lower lip.

"O.K.," he said finally. "Ditch your clothes in the brush, over there."

"Ditch our clothes!"

"Sure." The gateman nodded determinedly. "You didn't think you could come in the way you are, did you?"

"But we represent the United States Government—"

"I don't give a damn who you represent." The gateman was adamant. "If you want to enter Sunset Glow, you'll do it in bare skin or not at all."

The three stared from one to another. At last the major broke the silence.

"All right," he snapped. "Have it your own way. I suppose we *would* stand out like sore thumbs if we wore clothes."

It took the trio but a minute to disrobe. They slipped through the gate, a strange sight: Henry, small and spindly, chin-whiskers waving animatedly; Professor Paulsen, gaunt, lean-shanked, stooped; and Major Coggleston, still strong and well-built, but with a noticeable spare tire beginning to develop around his midriff.

Inside, a great open fire was burning, with a throng of male and female nudists disporting themselves about it. Some were toasting wieners and marshmallows; other only their own epidermis. There was much laughter and good-natured raillery.

"Joseph!" exclaimed Henry tensely, his goatee quivering to a point like a setter's tail. "There! See her? That blonde girl—"

His colleague turned on him.

"Henry Horn, I'm warning you for the last time!" he clipped. "We're having a hard enough time as it is, without your calling that young lady's anatomical details to our attention. So keep quiet!"

"Oh, all right," the little man sulked. "Just because you think you're smarter than I am—"

"Joe! Henry!" Major Coggleston interrupted excitedly. "Look! That man walking off into the shadows! Hasn't he red hair?"

The two friends shot quick glances in the direction the officer pointed.

"That's him!" squealed Henry, dancing about like a monkey on a stick. "That's the man who bought my glasses!"

"Come on!" The major darted forward, looking for all the world like an oversize kewpie doll. Henry and the professor followed close on his heels.

AHEAD of them, the red-headed nudist hurried farther and farther out of the firelight and into the brush. Bushes began to slap against the three friends' faces.

"Damn that devil!" fumed Major Coggleston. "I can't see him. Has he lost us?"

"Ouch!" yipped Henry, close beside him. "Oh! The mosquitoes!"

Professor Paulsen slapped vigorously at his own anatomy.

"They're awful!" he agreed. Then, to his friend, the major: "Do you see him? Where is he?"

And from the darkness behind them a voice answered:

"Right here I am, gentlemen! At your service, now and always!"

As one man, the trio whirled. A burly figure loomed in the gloom.

It was the red-headed man!

"Did you buy a pair of binoculars—" the major began.

The other waved him down.

"Sure, I bought 'em. And tonight I used 'em to snag onto the most important military secret I've seen in a month of Sundays. Believe me, mister, I'll make my fortune from this job!"

"Then you admit you're a spy?" the officer rasped, starting to move forward. "You admit you're the dirty dog who murdered our sentry—"

"Sure, sure, I admit it." The burly one seemed unperturbed.

"Why, you—"

"Hold it!" There was a sharp note of command in the red-headed man's voice this time. "Don't come no closer, buddy. Not if you want to keep your health!" He held out one ham-like hand. It gripped a heavy, bottle-shaped package.

"I got a little private lab in my suitcase," the spy explained. "When I saw how simple that formula was, I just brewed me up a batch of your new powder. Now I got it right here"—he waved the package—"complete with detonator. If you guys try to jump me, all I do is let go and the whole works goes off." He chuckled unpleasantly. "I guess you know what happens when two pounds of that stuff lets go."

The three friends shrank back. Henry's teeth already were chattering like the gourds in a rumba band.

"I guess you've got us," Major Coggleston said tautly. "However, you can't go far. My men are surrounding this camp right now."

The red-headed man sneered.

"Why don't you tell me something new?" he commented caustically. "Why'd you think I grabbed you?"

"What?"

"You didn't think you guys surprised me, did you?" The burly one laughed. "Hell, I saw you the second you came in.

"The way I'd planned it, I was going to hide out in the camp, here, until the stink blew over. Then I figured on pulling a fast sneak out of the country.

"But someone caught wise. I guess it was you"—he nodded at the quaking Henry—"so I had to revise things a little. I knew you'd have support coming up—Army Intelligence officers don't walk into trouble without backing except in the movies."

"SO what do you plan to do with us?" demanded the major. "You can see you haven't a chance to get away—"

"Haven't I?"

"The camp is surrounded."

"Sure." Their captor was amused. "That's why I grabbed you. The four of us are going to march out of here together. And you"—he jerked his head toward Major Coggleston—"are going to make your boys lay off. You'll go with me 'til I'm satisfied I'm in the clear. Then I'll turn you loose."

"And if we refuse?" grated the major.

The other shrugged.

"O.K. by me," he said. "We all blow up together."

There was a long moment of silence, pregnant with panic.

"You must have a great deal of confidence in your ability as a chemist, to prepare this explosive on such short notice and with limited equipment," Professor Paulsen commented at last.

The red-headed man laughed.

"Why shouldn't I have?" he demanded. "I may have been raised in Brooklyn, but I learned my business in Berlin, and they know how to teach there."

Another long silence.

"Well, make up your mind!" their captor grunted finally. "We ain't got all night, you know. Do you come quiet, or do I have to blow us all to smithereens?" He waved the package in his hand menacingly.

Major Coggleston threw up his hands in a gesture of defeat.

"You win!" he snapped. "If I were alone, I'd say blow and be damned. But my friends deserve a better fate."

"You're smart," the other reported approvingly. "Come on!"

Slowly, the trio moved forward.

"Hurry up!" grated the red-head. And then, to the professor: "You skinny, get a move on!"

For the gaunt savant was distinctly lagging. He had dropped back until he was a full yard behind Henry and the major, and only a step in front of the spy.

"Hurry up!" the Nazi repeated, his eyes suddenly cold and menacing.

"Joseph! Come on!" urged Henry, his teeth chattering. "Don't make him mad! Please, Joseph!"

"I'm coming," grunted the scientist. "I certainly can't be blamed if the pebbles and twigs hurt my feet, can I?"

And with that, he sprang.

Like a human octopus, all long arms and legs, he launched himself at the spy. His hands clutched at the red-head's throat. His legs wrapped around the man's waist and dashed him backward to the ground.

"Help!" screamed the spy. With a wild motion he hurled the package from him in a long arch.

Bang!

BUT the explosion was the crack of a detonating cap, not the thunderous roar of a heavy charge of powder.

Major Coggleston lunged forward. His fists beat a meaty tattoo on the spy's face.

The next instant the crackle of military commands and the thud of footsteps burst upon them. The four—Professor Paulsen, Major Coggleston and the spy, in a heap on the ground; and Henry Horn, wide-eyed and trembling, standing near at hand—were illumined in a powerful flashlight's beam. Half a dozen soldiers rushed up.

"Major! We heard that shot! Are you all right?"

The officer struggled to his feet, trying hard to preserve the dignity of his rank despite his nudity. In the light of the flash he looked even more than before like an overgrown kewpie doll.

"Of course I'm all right!" he puffed. "What's more, that red-headed rat on the ground is the spy and murderer we've been looking for. Take him away, men!"

He turned to Professor Paulsen.

"Joe, this is one time I don't know what to say. If it hadn't been for you that devil would have made a clean getaway."

"Forget it," retorted the gaunt scientist. "It's little enough I can do for my country at my age."

"Honestly, Joseph, I can't see how you got the nerve to do it!" marveled Henry, still wide-eyed. "Just think, we might all have been killed—"

The professor glared.

"What do you mean, we might all have been killed?"

"Why, the explosive in that package, and the detonator—really, Joseph, it was terribly dangerous—"

"Dangerous!" snorted the savant. "The only dangerous part was that he might have hit me over the head with it."

"But—the explosive—"

"Explosive, my eye!" And, again glaring: "Do you mean to tell me you can't understand why that stuff he had

in the package didn't go off, you abbreviated atom?"

Henry's goatee waggled uncertainly. He adjusted the steel-rimmed spectacles which were his only garment.

"Well . . . really, Joseph . . ."

"I'll admit right out I don't get it," broke in Major Coggleston. "You mean there wasn't any danger of that stuff going off?"

"Of course not." Professor Paulsen was distinctly snappish.

"But why—"

THE scientist turned back to Henry.

"Don't you remember what I said to you this morning about those devil's glasses of yours transposing letters instead of just reversing them? And that you told me it would take a special lens to straighten them out?"

"You mean—"

"Take any formula and transpose the symbols all the way through, and see what you get. Trinitrocresol, for instance. The formula is $C_7H_5N_3O_7$. Transpose it all the way through, and you have $_7O_3N_5H_7C$. In that particular case, it wouldn't even make sense. But when our red-headed spy said he was a chemist and hadn't had any trouble compounding this new explosive, I figured the formula must be one that would be at least half-way logical, no matter which way you wrote it. Only the odds were a million to one that one way it would equal an explosive; the other, nothing at all. So I didn't hesitate to attack him."

"Joe," said Major Coggleston admiringly, "that's a lot faster thinking than I've ever done. And I don't need to tell you how grateful the Army will be."

"Really, Joseph, it was awfully clever!" Henry chimed in. "I'd never have thought of it—"

And then, changing thought in midsentence:

"Look! There's that pretty blonde girl with the—"

"Henry!" exploded Professor Paulsen. "You're old enough to behave like a grown man, not an inspectionistic schoolboy!" His hand shot out to grip his little partner's goatee and jerk his eyes from the luscious creature now parading her charms before them.

"Ouch!" squealed Henry, his face screwing up with pain. "Joseph, you're hurting!"

"Then will you be good? Will you behave yourself?"

"Of course, Joseph. Just let me go!" Then, sulkily, as the tall scientist released him: "Though I still think you're mighty finicky, Joseph Paulsen. After all, what's wrong with my liking the cute way that girl wears the bangs across her forehead?"

THE END

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AMAZING FACTS

By A. MORRIS

Odd bits of truth exist in our daily life which are perhaps even more amazing than fiction itself

MUTUAL PROTECTION PACT

MANY hundreds of years ago (no one really knows exactly when) a species of ants and the acacias tree of tropical America decide to form an alliance for their mutual protection.

These ants are called the fire ants by the natives because their vicious and poisonous bite is like the prick of a red-hot needle. Now this bite was a protection against many of the ants' enemies, but it was no protection at all against the ant-eater, who is public enemy number one to the ant.

The acacias tree also was given a means of protection in the form of huge, curved thorns which kept most animals at a distance, but even with thorns the tree was helpless against leaf cutting ants and other insects.

To help one another the pact was concluded and the fire-ant moved into its new home in the base of the acacias tree. Now, when natives try to cut a path through the acacias trees, or if the leaf-cutting ant attacks the tree, thousands of fire-ants rush out to drive the intruders away. And neither man nor insect can withstand the needle-like bite of the fire-ant. On the other hand, the thorns of the acacias tree is about the only sure protection the fire-ants have against the ant-eater, for even the ant-eater will not put his long snout into the thorn-covered acacias tree.

* * *

THE LAKE WITHOUT WATER

THERE is only one small lake of about one hundred acres on the island of Trinidad, but it contains no water. Instead of water, the lake is filled with asphalt and is a source of seemingly endless income for its owners and the island treasury for just as soon as any asphalt is removed, the spot is filled up. Thus, while as much as 300,000 tons are removed each year, the amount of asphalt in the lake never shows any sign of diminishing.

The lake is firm enough to support a person's weight, but feels like a tar-covered street on a hot summer day. The asphalt is usually dug up with picks and each stroke produces a black lump about a foot and a half in diameter. These pieces of asphalt are loaded into cars which are pulled up a small incline by cable.

The asphalt is heated and processed in a plant to drive off any excess moisture and then run into barrels that are shipped all over the world. The entire distance covered from lake to ship is only about one mile making the entire process a very cheap one. In fact, outside of taxes, the only other expenses incurred are labor and packing supplies.

To make conditions even better, oil has been discovered beneath the lake and in its rear vicinity so that Trinidad is now producing an increasing volume of oil in addition to its asphalt.

* * *

THOSE GULLIBLE MALES

THE females of certain South American tribes have long ago discovered a sure-fire way to avoid being an old maid.

These tribes believe that the pale purple flower that grows on a climbing vine, when dried and made into a powder, has a strange power over men. If this powder is scattered in a man's hammock or if it is thrown on his body, he will instantly fall in love with the woman using the charm and marry her. If he does not marry her, the Indians believe he will go crazy. Of course, no one actually knows whether or not the man will go crazy for every male in the tribe believes in the magic of the powder and so he marries the wily female to avoid going crazy.

No one knows who "discovered" the magical powers of the flower, but we're willing to bet our last dollar it was a woman that was taking no chances on becoming an old maid.

* * *

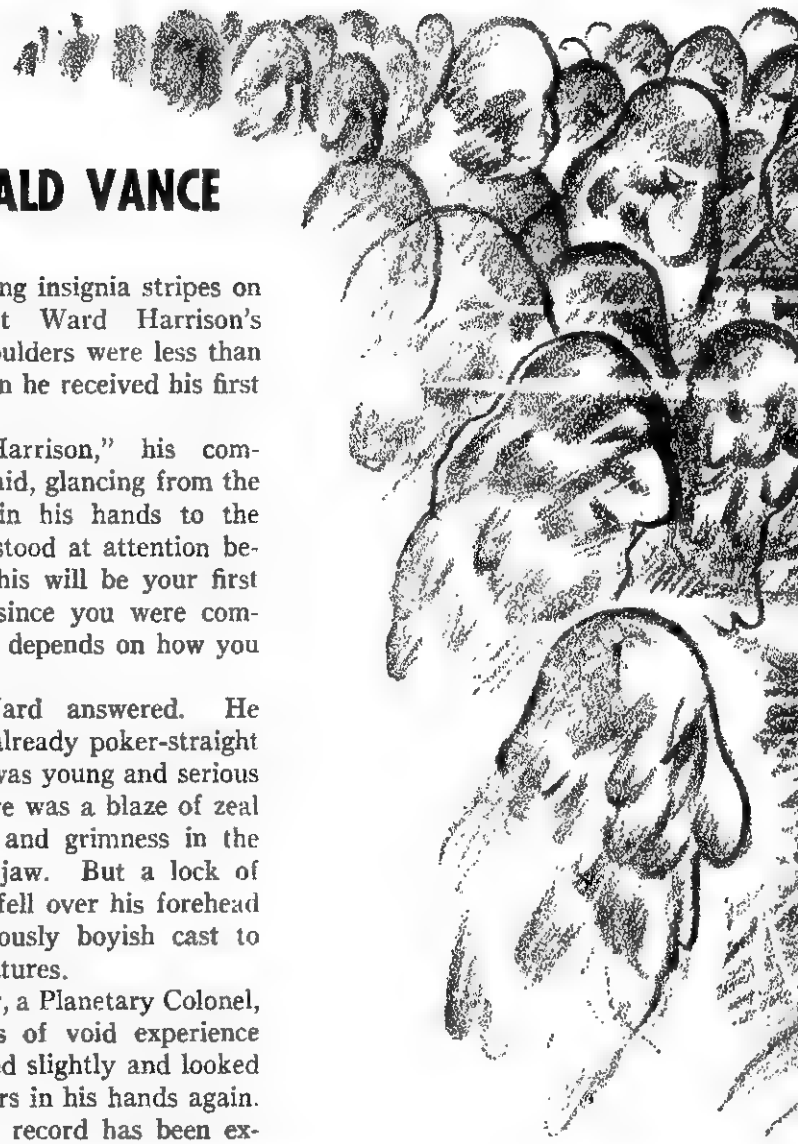
TOOTH DECAY

ACCORDING to a report of the United States Public Health Service following a survey of a typical town near Washington, D. C., the most common ailment next to the common cold is decayed teeth.

The survey was limited to the school children of the town and it was found that 19 out of every 20 children that had reached the age of 15 has or at one time had one or more tooth decays.

The Health Service was not able to say just what caused such a high rate of tooth decays, but they advised expectant mothers and children to eat foods containing tooth-building qualities. Children especially should keep their teeth clean and free from food particles that often start decay. Regular visits to the dentist were also prescribed to catch minor decays before they had time to develop.

MONSOONS



by GERALD VANCE

THE gleaming insignia stripes on Lieutenant Ward Harrison's broad shoulders were less than two days old when he received his first assignment.

"Lieutenant Harrison," his commanding officer said, glancing from the papers he held in his hands to the young man who stood at attention before his desk, "this will be your first touch of action since you were commissioned. A lot depends on how you handle yourself."

"Yes sir," Ward answered. He straightened his already poker-straight spine. His face was young and serious and intent. There was a blaze of zeal in his blue eyes and grimness in the tightness of his jaw. But a lock of blonde hair that fell over his forehead lent an incongruously boyish cast to his grimly set features.

His commander, a Planetary Colonel, with thirty years of void experience behind him, smiled slightly and looked down at the papers in his hands again.

"Your training record has been ex-

Ward Harrison got himself into a barrel of trouble when he accepted a job at the Martian Observation Station. There were fearful "things" on Mars. . .

Dreadful weaving shapes slithered through the storm toward him

cellent, Harrison," he said, "and I am gratified to note that you apparently realize the seriousness of our work." He leaned back in his chair, looked up at the young Lieutenant. "It took science hundreds of years to lick the problem of crossing the void of space to the outer planets. Now, that that much has been accomplished, the task of exploring and possibly developing and colonizing those planets is ahead of us. The most important part of that work is up to men like you, Lieutenant Harrison. You are attached to the meteorology department with the job of doing the preliminary analysis and exploration on the various planets whose raw materials are essential to Earth. Never for a minute underestimate the importance of that work."

Ward cleared his throat. "I won't sir."

"Good. There are other branches of the service that might seem more glamorous, but all of them are dependent on your research and findings. Without meteorological survey the entire network of space stations we have established would have been impossible. And the need today for accurate and thorough research on atmospheric conditions in the Universe is greater than ever before. Always keep that in mind."

"I will, sir," Ward answered.

"Good," the colonel said. He ran a heavy hand through his silver-dusted hair and then picked up again the sheaf of papers from his desk.

"Your first assignment is to one of our established observation stations on Mars," he said.

WARD kept his face woodenly expressionless; but it was hard to conceal his disappointment. He wanted adventure and danger. He wanted to prove his courage and loyalty on some perilous journey to an uncharted, unexplored area, and there was little hope for such action on an established base.

"The station to which you are being sent," the colonel went on, "was established three years ago by the man who is still in command there, a civilian by the name of Thomas Halliday. He is alone there, now. His assistant died about six months ago. You will act as Halliday's assistant in atmospheric experimentation and in the collection of meterologic data. Despite the fact that he is a civilian you will take your orders from him. Is that much clear?"

"Yes," Ward said. He had to fight to keep the bitterness he was feeling from showing in his voice. He had been prepared for anything, but this was too much to accept cheerfully. Serving on a dull, one-man base, under the domination of a civilian, who had probably been rejected by the regular service for timidity or incompetence, was a bitter pill to swallow. Ward found a real, though illogical, resentment welling in him. And the object of this resentment was Thomas Halliday.

"Thomas Halliday," the colonel said, "is a very careful, painstaking meteorologist. He is completely dependable and reliable. The information he has sent us to date is accurate and thorough. Moreover he is extremely cautious." The colonel paused and frowned and his thick strong fingers drummed irritably on the top of his desk.

"Damn it!" he said with sudden explosive impatience. "Sometimes I think the man is too cautious. He's been there three years now and he still hasn't sent us a complete report on conditions there. Caution and care are fine qualities but, like all things, they can be overdone. We're planning on erecting a large special base in his locality when we finally get all the informa-

tion. But we can't make a move until Halliday comes through."

"Is there any reason why the research might have been delayed?" Ward asked.

The colonel shook his head.

"Not as far as we know. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not damning any man until I know all the facts. I'm not a pot-bellied, arm-chair admiral. I've been in the void myself long enough to realize that you can't pass judgment on a man's work until you've actually seen the situation he's up against. You can't get the complete picture from a three hundred word report. There may be other factors to consider that we here don't know about. But Halliday's data isn't coming in fast enough and I'm taking steps to get at the bottom of the trouble. I'm sending you there, Harrison, because your record indicates that you're a go-getter. Maybe what Halliday needs is a little more recklessness, a little more impulsiveness and a lot less caution. I'm hoping that you will act as a spur to Halliday. Think you're up to the job?"

Ward's eyes were flashing with excitement. His bitter disappointment had vanished.

"I'll do my absolute best, sir," he said. The colonel's words had crystallized his swiftly-formed animosity for this Thomas Halliday. The man was obviously a timid creature without sufficient guts to do a man's job. Ward felt an itching impatience to get started on this assignment. He wanted to meet Thomas Halliday. He was very anxious to begin his new duties as a spur to the man.

"Halliday hasn't given us much information about what he's discovered on that section of Mars," the colonel said. "He's confined his reports exclusively to atmospheric data. In his first report he mentioned that the area was inhabited and I got the impression that he hadn't found the natives particularly friendly. But since he hasn't mentioned them since, I gather that he hasn't had any trouble with them. . . .

"I guess that's about all, Lieutenant. This is an important job. And if you find any reason for Halliday's delay in getting that job done, I want you to flash me a message immediately. I'm putting a lot of confidence in you, young man, but I don't think it's misplaced."

The colonel stood up and extended his hand.

"Good luck, son."

Ward took the older man's hand in a firm grip.

"Thank you, sir. I'll do everything I can to justify your confidence in me."

He saluted, right - about - faced smartly and strode toward the door. The colonel followed his straight young back with his eyes and there was a smile of pride on his face. Lieutenant Ward Harrison, in the opinion of the colonel, was definitely an excellent addition to the forces of Earth.

Lieutenant Ward Harrison thought so himself, but he would have suffered his tongue to be torn out before admitting it.

THREE days later, at 24:40 inter-Stellar time, Ward Harrison arrived at the Earth observation base located in the uncharted, inaccessible area on the southern plane of the planet, Mars.

As he flashed into the atmosphere of the planet he cut the rear propulsion rockets of his slim single-seater and prepared to land. He sighted the base's small cluster of buildings and the mooring tower in his fore visi-screen and he made quick rapid adjustments on his instrument panel as his slender ship

slanted toward them in a screaming dive. . . .

When the nose of his ship made contact with a mooring socket, he set all instruments at zero. He climbed to his feet and stretched wearily. Then he walked to the sliding side door of the ship, released the air lock and stepped out onto the ramp that flanked the mooring tower.

From this position, some two hundred feet above the ground, he had his first look at the terrain of Mars. Great gray wastelands spread endlessly in all four directions and the only break in this monotony was a low ridge of hills on the far-distant eastern horizon.

Ward shivered slightly. He hadn't been prepared for anything this depressing. The small group of squat buildings beneath him looked like tiny objects adrift in a vast, terrible gray sea.

A man appeared at the door of the central building and Ward felt an idiotic sensation of relief at the sight of a human, moving figure in that dead, silent, gray terrain.

The man waved to Ward and walked from the doorway toward the base of the mooring tower.

Ward descended to the ground in the small cage of the tower elevator. He stepped out onto the soft, flaky soil of Mars as the man he had seen from above came up to the tower.

"Lieutenant Harrison reporting for duty, sir," he said. He saluted and noticed with a certain satisfaction the other's embarassment at this military recognition which he didn't deserve.

"My name is Halliday," the man said, after a short awkward pause. He extended his hand. "I'm certainly glad to have you here, Lieutenant."

As Ward shook hands, he appraised the man carefully, and found nothing in his examination to change his previously acquired opinion.

Thomas Halliday was small and stooped, with sallow features and nervously shifting eyes, which looked startlingly large behind thick strong glasses. His hair was thin and faded brown in color. There was a peculiar tight look about his mouth and jaw, as if he were in a continual state of faint exasperation.

This, thought Ward, was the man who had been holding up the development of this area for three years. And, looking at him, it was easy to see why.

Ward had his bag in his hand. Halliday, noticing it, asked, "Did you bring any arms with you?"

Ward patted the raytube in the smart military holster at his hip.

"Just this," he said. He added drily, "Expecting trouble?"

"No," Halliday answered. His eyes shifted from Ward's and swept about in a long inspection of the vast, sprawling, deserted terrain that stretched away on all four sides like a boundless ocean.

"But," he added, "it's when you're not expecting trouble that you're most likely to run into it."

WARD smiled to himself as he followed Halliday's thin stooped figure to the main building, a squat solid structure of heavy *duralloy* steel, with only one door and no windows at all.

The man was obviously a neurotic mass of nerves, or else he was indulging in a bit of melodrama to impress his new assistant.

Halliday stepped aside at the door and Ward preceded him into the hot, sparsely furnished room. Halliday followed him, closing the door behind him and setting the mechanism of a powerful automatic lock before turning to Ward with an apologetic little smile.

"You'll find it rather cramped at first," he said. "I'll sleep out here and you can use the storeroom as a bedroom. That's all the living quarters we have, excepting the kitchen, but I'm sure we'll manage."

Ward set his grip down and glanced about at the chart-covered walls, the plain, badly scuffed furniture and he was not particularly enthused at the prospect of being cooped up in this hot little oven of a room with Halliday.

"What about the other buildings?" he asked. "Surely there'd be room there for me to bunk."

"We use those building for equipment," Halliday said. "And besides, this building is safer."

Ward glanced at the little man with a faint, ironic smile.

"Is there something here to be afraid of?" His tone was blandly polite, but he could not completely conceal an undercurrent of contempt.

"I don't mean to alarm you, Lieutenant," Halliday said, "but this area of Mars is not quite the safest place in the universe." He removed his thick glasses with a nervous little gesture and smiled uncertainly at Ward. "I really think it wiser for you to sleep here."

"Unless that's an order," Ward said, "I'd rather sleep in comfort in one of the other buildings and take my chances on your bogy-men catching me."

Halliday replaced his glasses. He was no longer smiling.

"I'm afraid, Lieutenant, you must consider it as an order."

He turned slowly and re-checked the huge gleaming lock on the door, then walked to a littered, dutsy desk in one corner of the room and sat down. It was obvious that the discussion was ended.

Ward shrugged and carried his grip into a small windowless storeroom that was directly off the main room of the small structure. There were bales of supplies, a cot and a stool. A vague musty odor permeated the air. He tossed his grip onto the cot, stripped off his tunic and walked back into the room where Halliday was seated at his desk.

Halliday looked up with a smile and removed his glasses with a characteristic nervous movement of his thin hands.

"Not exactly the choicest accommodations, eh?" he said, in an attempt at heartiness, which struck Ward as being almost pathetic.

"I'll get by," Ward said. He loosened the collar of his shirt and glanced at the massive steel door, closed and tightly locked. "Any objection to letting in a little air?" he asked. "It's pretty close in here."

HALLIDAY smiled and his eyes flicked to the closed door. He put his glasses on again and spent quite a time adjusting them to his thin nose.

"I'm afraid we'll have to put up with the closeness," he said.

Ward sighed and sat down in a chair facing Halliday.

"You're afraid of something," he said bluntly. "Supposing you tell me about it."

"As a matter of fact, I was meaning to," Halliday said. "You see, on this section we're pretty well isolated from the rest of the Earth stations on Mars. We receive all supplies and mail by a direct materialization unit. No space craft puts in here. We're here all alone and if anything happened to us all the data and work that has been compiled might be lost."

As Halliday removed his glasses again with a quick aimless gesture, Ward thought, "A lot you care about the records and data. It's your skin

you want to save."

Halliday coughed and replaced his glasses.

"This area is inhabited by a species of creature which I do not believe has been classified. I do not know if they are human or if they possess intelligence. I do not even know if they are 'alive' in the sense that we speak of life. Possibly their energy is of electrical or carboniferous origin, or it could be even vegetable in nature. As you see I know little enough about these neighbors of ours, but I do know that they are dangerous. They resent the work that is being done here." Halliday frowned and twisted a pencil in his hands. "I'm not even sure of that. Possibly they are without rational motivation at all. It may be that they are merely moved to action by the sight of another object in motion. But whatever their reason, they have been very troublesome. That, really, is all I know about them. And that is the reason that I exercise such care. I have a small periscope installed on the roof and before I unlock the door I study the entire surrounding terrain to be sure there are no Raspers in sight."

"Why do you call them Raspers?" Ward asked.

"Because of a peculiar sound that seems to emanate from them," Halliday explained. "My former assistant and I had to call them something and Raspers seemed as logical as anything else."

"Have you ever seen one of these—er—Raspers?" Ward asked.

"I'm not sure," Halliday said thoughtfully. He removed his glasses again. "I've had two brushes with them, but I'm not sure that I saw them distinctly either time. Possibly the picture that came to my mind, later, was supplied by my imagination. But I know that there is something very repellent and fearsome about them. I *felt* that much."

Ward crossed his legs and lit a cigarette casually.

"Can these things be killed?" he asked.

"I don't know," Halliday answered. "The two chances I had I was too scared to find out."

Ward felt a cold anger against this man growing in him. This man had been entrusted with the task of surveying the atmospheric conditions of this area—a vital, desperately necessary job—and he was dawdling along, timidly hugging the cover of this fortress because of a stupid, half-imaginary fear of the natives of the area. He felt his cheeks growing hot.

"We can't stay cooped up here indefinitely," he said. "How about the work we're supposed to be doing. Or does that bother you?"

HALLIDAY looked at him queerly and then dropped his eyes. He fiddled nervously with his glasses.

Ward suddenly found the gesture maddening.

"For Pete's sake!" he exploded. "Leave 'em on, or leave 'em off, one or the other. That's apparently your only job here, taking those damn glasses off and putting them back on again."

"I'm sorry," Halliday said quickly, apologetically. "It's just a habit I guess. It's a little something to break the nervous tension of being here all alone, thinking . . ."

His voice trailed off and his hand moved nervously toward his glasses and then fell back limply in his lap.

"About the work here," he said in a mild, controlled voice, "we are forced to work on a definitely limited schedule. I have field apparatus located at points several miles distant from here.

But we can't venture out to take the necessary readings until the weather is propitious."

"What's the weather got to do with our taking readings?" Ward demanded.

"Simply this: There are certain periods of intense precipitation on this area of Mars. These periods are accompanied by high velocity winds. The atmospheric disturbance reaches monsoon proportions. During such periods, for some reason, the Raspers are exceptionally active. Something in the nature of the monsoon reacts on them with very savage results. They seem to feed on the electric disturbances in the atmosphere. They go wild during these changes in the weather and search for any moving thing to destroy. In some manner they are able to cover enormous distances during the monsoon and they can travel with incredible speed. When a monsoon is threatening I never leave the station."

Ward listened in growing irritation to this explanation.

"How often do you have monsoons here?" he demanded.

"Unfortunately, quite often," Halliday answered. "All of my instruments indicate now that one is brewing. I haven't been able to do more than a few hours of work in the last two months. I've been waiting for the weather to break, but so far it hasn't."

"Do you mean to tell me," Ward said incredulously, "that you've been sitting here, twiddling your thumbs for the past two months because you're afraid to take a chance on a wind blowing up?"

"That is exactly what I mean," Halliday said. "But it isn't the wind I'm afraid of. It's the things that come with the wind that make any field work impossible. I've learned a few things about the Raspers in my three years and one is that it doesn't pay to give them a chance. That's all they need. That's all they're waiting for."

Ward stood up impatiently and jammed his fists into his pockets. It took all of his self control not to left his anger and contempt for the man explode in roaring fury.

"I can't understand your attitude," he said at last, through tight lips. "I'm green and new here. I don't know anything about the set-up except what you've told me. But I know from your own admission that you've never seen these things you're so mortally afraid of, you've never stood up to them and given them a taste of ray juice to think about, you don't really know anything about them, except that you're terrified of the very thought of them. That isn't a reasonable attitude. Only one kind of man thinks that way, and that's a man without a touch of starch in his backbone, or a bit of honest-to-goodness guts in his make-up. If you want to hug this place like a scared school-girl that's all right, but I'll be double-damned if I'm going to let any superstitious nonsense keep me from doing the job I was sent here to do."

"That is a very brave speech, Lieutenant," Halliday said, "and I admire you for it. But you are going to do as I say in spite of your own opinions. We will stay here and take no unnecessary chances until our instruments indicate that the monsoon weather has passed. That is an order."

WARD choked back his wrath. He glared at Halliday for an instant, then wheeled and strode into the small storeroom that was to serve as his sleeping quarters. He banged the door shut and sat down on the edge of the cot, his fingers opening and closing nervously.

He wasn't sure just what he'd do, but he didn't intend to stand for Halliday's craven policy of hiding in a locked

room, instead of doing the work his country expected him to do. Halliday was a psychopathic case; his mind was full of a hundred and one imagined horrors and they kept him from doing his job. There was little wonder that he had been three years attempting to compile the information that should have been gathered in three months.

The man was so terrified of imagined dangers that he was helpless to act. Ward felt a moment of pity for him, the pity the brave invariably feel for the weak and cowardly. But he also felt a cold and bitter contempt for the man who had allowed his own fear and timidity to hold up the important work of accumulating data on this section of the planet. If he wasn't man enough to do the job, he should have at least been man enough to admit it.

Ward decided that the next day he'd have the thing out. He undressed slowly and stretched out on the narrow cot, but sleep was a long time in coming.

When he stepped from his room the next day he saw that Halliday was standing in the doorway gazing out over the dull gray Martian landscape.

"Aren't you taking quite a chance?" he asked, with heavy sarcasm.

Halliday ignored the gibe. "No. I made a careful check before I released the door lock and opened up. Did you sleep well?"

"Fair," Ward said. "How can you tell the days and nights here? Is there ever any change in the sky?"

Halliday shook his head. "Sometimes it gets a little darker, sometimes it's lighter. When you're tired you go to bed. That's the only standard we have." He shaded his eyes with his hand and stared for a long moment at the bleak, depressing horizon.

Looking over his shoulder, Ward noticed swirling humid mists drifting in the air and, above, huge massive clouds of dense blackness were gathering. He felt a peculiar electric tightness in the atmosphere.

Halliday closed and locked the door carefully.

"Might as well have breakfast," he said. "There's nothing else we can do today."

"Do we have to stay cooped up here all day?" Ward asked.

"I'm afraid so. This weather is ready to break any minute now, and when it does I intend to be behind a well-locked door."

Ward's lips curled slightly.

"Okay," he said quietly, "we'll wait for the monsoon to blow over. Then, Raspers or not, I'm going to work."

BUT four long days dragged by and there was no indication that the monsoon weather was prepared to break. Low dense clouds were massed overhead and the air was gusty with flurries of humid wind.

Halliday grew increasingly nervous. He spent every waking hour at the periscope in a constant study of the dark horizons and he said little to Ward.

Ward's impatience grew with every inactive moment.

"How much longer are we going to hide in here like scared rats?" he blazed finally. He paced furiously up and down the small room, glaring in rage at Halliday's stooped figure.

Halliday smiled nervously and removed his glasses. His fingers were trembling so violently that he almost dropped them to the floor.

"I can't even guess," he said shakily. "I was hoping that the monsoon would blow over, but I'm afraid we're in for it."

"You've been saying that ever since I arrived," Ward said bitterly.

Halliday was studying a *aerograph* on the wall. When he turned to Ward, his face was gray. His lips were more tightly clamped than ever.

"If anything should happen to our front door lock," he said, "there's an exit we can use in the kitchen. Possibly you've noticed the small door beside the refrigeration and oxygen unit. That leads to a small room that can be locked from the inside. There are supplies there to last a week. I didn't tell you this before because I was afraid it might alarm you."

"Thanks for sparing my feelings," Ward snapped. "But I don't think I'll be needing your cosy little refuge. I've stalled just about enough. I was sent here to do a job and by Heaven I'm going to try and finish it."

He jerked his tunic from the back of a chair and scooped up his raytube and belt. Halliday regarded him in silence as he buckled on the weapon.

"What do you think you're going to do?" he asked at last.

"First I'm going to flash a message to Earth, asking that I be placed in command here," Ward said. He buttoned his tunic swiftly, and his eyes were cold slits of anger as he looked at Halliday nervously fumbling with his glasses. "I was sent here with instructions to find out what the delay was in getting the work done. I've found out to my satisfaction. You've done about one day's work for every month you've spent cooped up in here, trembling every time the wind howled. When I come back I'll have an authorization from GHQ to take over here immediately. Then you and I are going to work and damn the weather. If you don't want to cooperate," Ward slapped the weapon at his hip, "I'll use what force is necessary to make you."

"Please listen to me," Halliday said desperately. "You're impulsive and reckless and I admire you for it. Sometimes I wish I were more like that. But I know the situation here better than you do. We'd be running a terrible risk trying to work right at this time."

"Sure," Ward said, "We'd be running a risk. That's apparently your entire philosophy. Sit tight, do nothing, because there might be a slight risk involved."

He turned and strode to the door.

"Wait," Halliday cried. "You can't go out now."

Ward disengaged the lock with a swift deft motion.

"Who's going to stop me?" he asked.

Halliday crossed to his side with quick, pattering strides. He grabbed him by the arm and pulled him around.

"Please listen to me," he said imploringly. "I know what I'm talking about. I—"

Ward shook the hand loose and stared coldly into Halliday's, white strained features.

"You're gutless, Halliday," he said in a low tense voice. "Now keep out of my way."

He turned to the door again, but Halliday grabbed him suddenly and pushed him back.

"You're not going to do it," he cried, his voice trembling. "I'm not going to let you."

WARD grabbed the man by his lapels and swung him away from the door. He stepped close to him and his right fist chopped down in a savage axe-like stroke. The short, powerful blow exploded under Halliday's chin. His knees buckled and he sprawled limply to the floor.

Ward stared down at the still form and he felt an instant of regret for striking a man fifty pounds lighter than himself, but he realized that it had been the only course open.

He drew his raytube, inspected it quickly to make sure that it was in perfect order, then swung open the door and stepped out into the gray murkiness of the Martian atmosphere.

The wind had increased to a wild mad scream. Flaky particles of soil stung his face like myriad needle-pricks as he braced himself against the buffeting force of the gale.

He couldn't see more than a few feet ahead of him, but he knew the general direction of the building which housed the materialization unit and he headed that way, bent almost double against the wind.

He heard and saw nothing but the wild wail of the monsoon and the gray swirling murk. There was an awesome feeling in staggering blindly on through a dead gray world of howling dust-laden wind.

He felt as if he were the only person left alive in the universe. But he plowed stubbornly forward. There was work to be done and he felt a grim exaltation in the knowledge that he had enough fortitude to let nothing stop him from doing his job.

Hell! What was a little wind? This thought came to him and he smiled grimly. He'd show Halliday! He'd show 'em all! Nothing was going to stop him!

There was a peculiar crackling sound in the air about him, as if bolts of unseen lightning were slashing through the turbulent atmosphere, but he forged ahead. He knew there was little danger of an electric bolt striking him as long as he was out in the open.

The distance to the goal was not a matter of a dozen yards or so, but it took him fully five minutes to cover the stretch. He had trouble breathing; each breath was snatched from his open mouth by the fury of the wind. And his eyes were rimmed with dust and streaming from the stinging bite of the flaky soil.

When he reached the wall of the building he was sobbing for breath and blind from the whiplash of the wind. He sagged against the comfortable bulk of the squat, solid structure and wiped at his eyes with a handkerchief, but the wind soon tore the flimsy cloth from his fingers.

There was nothing to do but find the door of the building as quickly as possible. Using his hands as groping feelers he staggered around two corners of the buildings until his fingers closed about a door knob.

The gale was increasing in intensity; the roaring lash of the wind was wild and explosive, as if the floodgates of Nature had swung open to unleash this maelstrom of fury and destruction.

The sputtering crackle of electric energy he had noticed seemed to be swelling in volume, rising steadily in pitch and fury. And then a new sound was added to the hideous cacaphony. Ward heard it faintly at first and it failed to register on his consciousness.

The new sound was an unearthly rasping noise that roared about his head and crashed against his ear drums with terrifying impact. The sound seemed everywhere; it seemed to emanate from the unleashed forces of the storm itself; its marrow-chilling, rasping moan was a demoniacial cry, screaming a weird defiance into the teeth of the mighty monsoon.

WARD, hugging the building, heard the rasping sound, and he remembered what Halliday had told him. Crouched against the side of the structure, listening to that weird, desolate wail of unnameable horror, he felt his heart thudding with sudden fear against his ribs.

The door of the building was jammed.

He slammed his shoulder against its solid unyielding surface again and again—without avail! The harrowing rasping undertone of the crushing gale was growing and swelling—it seemed to be converging on him from all sides, a creation of the gray whining murk of the monsoon.

Ward's hand tightened on the butt of his raytube. He wheeled about, pressing his back to the wall of the building. His eyes raked the swirling turbulence of the storm.

And through the raging, eddying mists of gray his wind-lashed eyes made out dreadful, weaving shapes, slithering through the fury of the storm—toward him!

An instinctive scream tore at the muscles of his throat, but the wind whipped the sound from his mouth and cast it into the gale before it could reach his ears.

He crouched and raised his gun.

The shapes were vague misty illusions to his straining eyes. Then a blanket of wind swept over him, buffeting him against the wall at his back, and in a monetary flick of visibility that followed the blast, he was able to see the *things* that were advancing toward him.

There was one nauseous, sense-stunning instant of incredible horror as his eyes focused on the nameless monstrosities that were revealed in the gray mists of the monsoon.

One instant of sheer numbing horror, an instinct a billion years old, buried beneath centuries' weight in his subconscious, suddenly writhed into life, as pulsing and compelling as the day it had been generated.

The lost forgotten instincts of man's mind that warn him of the horror and menace of the unknown, the nameless, the unclean, were clamoring wildly at his consciousness.

For these *things* were hideous and repellent in their very essence. Whether they were alive or not, his numbed, horror-stunned brain would never know. The dry, rustling rasping sound that emanated from them seemed to partake of the same nature as the electrical energy generated by the monsoon, but that was only a fleeting, terror-strained impression.

The raytube fell from his palsied hand; but he didn't notice. There was only one blind motivation governing his thoughts.

And that was flight!

The unreasoning terror of the hunted, of the helpless, gripped him with numbing force. There was no thought in his mind to fight, to face these things that emerged from the dead grayness of the monsoon, but only a hideously desperate desire to escape.

WITHOUT conscious thought or volition his legs suddenly churned beneath him and he lunged forward blindly, desperately, lurching through the buffeting force of the gale toward the sanctuary of the building where he had left Halliday.

The rasping, nerve-chilling sound roared about his head and the lashing screech of the monsoon was a banshee-wail in his ears as he stumbled and staggered on, driven by the wildest, most elemental fear he had ever known.

Suddenly the squat structure loomed directly ahead of him, only a yard away. The door was standing ajar, and, with a broken sob of relief, he lunged into the lighted interior of the room.

Halliday was crawling dazedly to his feet as Ward staggered blindly through the door, his breath coming in great choking sobs.

"My God—"

Halliday's voice broke and Ward saw that his eyes were staring in horror beyond him, to the still open door where the gray swirling fury of the monsoon was creeping in.

And other *things* were in the open doorway!

Ward knew that without turning to look. The horror mirrored in Halliday's face told him that more plainly than could his own eyes.

There was horror and fear in Halliday's face, but the tightness of his lips did not relax into the flaccid looseness of hysteria.

With superhuman control he was keeping a grip on himself.

"Don't move!" he snapped, through set jaws. "I'll try to get at the rifle."

Ward's heart was thundering a tattoo of terror. Halliday's words made no impression on the horror-stunned brain. He lunged wildly across the room, dimly he heard Halliday's sudden shouted warning.

Without a backward glance he lurched into the small room that served as a kitchen. Through the fog of terror that swirled about his mind, he remembered only one thing: Halliday's remark of a refuge built there for emergency purposes.

His fingers tore open the small door alongside the refrigerator unit. A black passage stretched ahead of him and he plunged into dark shelter, jerking the door shut after him.

A light snapped on when the door closed and he saw that he was in a small, stoutly reinforced storeroom, with bales of supplies and equipment packed against the walls.

He threw the heavy bolt that locked the door and sagged against a wall, his breath coming in deep shuddering gasps. There was no sound from outside. Gradually his labored breathing subsided and he stared with dull, unseeing eyes ahead of him.

And in that moment Ward Harrison came face-to-face with what he had done. In a single gleaming flash of understanding, he realized that he had bought his life with his honor.

A shuddering sob passed through his body.

He remembered with scalding self-hatred the things he had said to Halliday—a man who had endured the horror of this isolated base for three years. He had called a man cowardly who had more courage in his smallest finger than Ward had in his entire body.

Halliday had stuck here, doing his job, making no complaints or excuses, always aware of the horrible, soul-numbing danger he was facing.

WARD cursed and buried his face in his trembling hands. With bitter shame he recalled his jeering remarks to Halliday about his nervous habit of removing his glasses.

God! Three years on this hellish base and the only sign a nervous habit of fiddling with his glasses. Stark raving madness would have been the effect on any other person Ward could imagine.

At that instant he despised himself more than he had ever despised any human being in his life.

And he knew that the worst punishment that would ever be meted to him, would be the mere act of living and being able to think—to remember.

With feverish eyes he glared about the room. A small leaden cask was set apart from the other equipment and it was marked with three xxx's, the indication of high explosive contents.

Ward dropped to his knees and pried open the lid of the small cask. It was filled with neat rows of U-235 pellets,

hardly an inch in diameter. He picked up one in each hand and then stood up and walked to the door.

He was beyond thought or reason. He knew he was going to his death and he felt nothing but a numb sense of anticipation. He knew that in dying he would not expiate the crime of cowardice he had committed. Nothing would ever erase the stigma of that shame. A thousand deaths could not do that.

He did not actually think these things. His mind was wrapped in a fog of blind instinct. There was something he must do—do immediately. That was as far as his mind would go.

The kitchen and front room of the small building were empty and the door leading to the outside was open. The wild raging storm of the monsoon blew in the door, whipping papers into the air, resounding against the walls with a booming roar.

Ward strode across the room, bracing himself against the blast of the wind. He stepped through the doorway and the full force of the wind almost bent him backward, but he moved on, fighting his way forward.

After six feet, the building was lost in the grayness. He was again alone in a wild howling world of horror and death.

Then he heard the rasping noise of the *things* directly ahead of him, and an instant later he was able dimly to make out their weaving shapes in the swirling mists of the storm.

The were coming toward him.

WITH a grim exultation pounding in his temples, Ward hurled a pellet of U-235 directly into their midst. The thunderous reverberations of the explosion rocked the ground under his feet. A terrific blast of air that dwarfed the raging turbulence of the monsoon roared about his head.

He staggered back, almost falling.

When he could see again, he made out a great hole in the ranks of the *things* moving toward him.

His laugh was a wild cry in the fury of the night.

"Damn you!" he shouted.

His arm whipped back and the second pellet crashed into the serried ranks of the deadly rasping creatures.

Something grasped his ankle as the second pellet exploded. He fell backward, striking the ground hard. A hand grabbed his and then, miraculously, incredibly, Halliday was pulling him to his feet, jerking him toward the building.

They stumbled through the door together. Ward fell to the floor as Halliday wheeled and slammed the door, throwing the automatic bolts with the same motion.

Halliday knelt beside Ward.

"Good work," he said huskily. "They were holding me. I don't know what they were planning. Those bombs blew them into little pieces. Luckily I go through the blast all right." He gripped Ward's arm suddenly. "You came through too, son."

"No," Ward said dully. "I didn't. I ran out on you. I'm a fool, a yellow fool."

"A coward wouldn't have come back," Halliday said quietly. "We're going to lick this job together, from now on. We've found a weapon to use against the Raspers. I never thought of high explosives."

He grinned suddenly and the tightness was leaving his mouth. "It doesn't seem so terrible when you've got something to fight back with."

Ward looked up at Halliday and a faint smile touched his own lips. "Some*one* to fight with, means a lot, too."

(Concluded on page 241)

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Louis Pasteur

He was one of the greatest biologists and pathologists who ever lived. To him we owe millions of human lives.

THE work of the celebrated French biological chemist and pathologist, Louis Pasteur, has given knowledge of the highest importance to nearly every branch of physical and natural science.

Pasteur was born December 27, 1822, at Dôle, among the foothills of the Jura mountains in eastern France. Early in life he chose chemistry and medicine as the field he wanted to enter. He graduated from the Ecole Normale, Paris, in 1847. In 1848 he became professor of physics at Dijon and in the following year accepted the professorship of chemistry at Strassburg. He became dean and professor of chemistry in the faculty of sciences at Lille in 1854. He remained there until 1857, when he went to Paris as scientific director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure and was elected a member of the Institute. In 1863 he became professor of geology, physics, and chemistry at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and from 1867 to 1889 he was professor of chemistry at the Sorbonne. A little later he founded and conducted during the balance of his active life, the Pasteur Institute; which became at once a very famous center of research in his particular line of investigation. He died near Saint-Cloud, September 28, 1895.

By his classical researches on optically active substances and their separation into isomeric modifications of identical chemical but different physical properties, Pasteur became the originator of the science of stereochemistry.

This naturally leads up to the study of the phenomena of fermentation and putrefaction, and their relation to the micro-organisms in the atmosphere. By passing a current of air through gun-cotton, and then dissolving the latter in alcohol, an insoluble residue is obtained which, under the microscope, is found to consist largely of mature and immature living germs.

In the field of fermentation and the germ theory his work was even greater. He showed that lactic, butyric, acetic, and other fermentations are caused by microörganisms, and established on a firm scientific basis the principle that spontaneous generation cannot take place, at least under ordinary conditions.

The study of such germs—a hitherto unknown field of life—occupied the remainder of Pasteur's days. The discoveries made therein by him, and by those who have followed in his steps, have profoundly affected individual humanity, and the industrial world. To mention a few of the most important will indicate the scope of his labors, and the gain that has resulted from them.

Pasteur's studies on the diseased conditions of wine and beer have rendered possible and easy the prevention of these conditions. No less important were his investigations on the silkworm's disease, pébrine, and its cure.

In discovering the bacterial cause of anthrax and splenic apoplexy in cattle, and of fowl cholera, and the remedies in each case, enormous annual losses in domestic animals has been prevented, and a system of animal vaccination worked out. This one discovery alone was epoch-making in the science of disease. He prevented the various diseases caused by septic bacteria by inoculating animals with a milder form of the disease by means of a weaker brood of bacteria artificially cultured. Pasteur found that by keeping a cultured crop of specific microörganisms at a certain temperature with a full supply of oxygen he could reduce organisms to an incapacity for producing spores, therefore to sterility. But before this point is reached the cultured organism loses its virulence, although still germinating; vaccination with it then produces a mild disease, which effectually protects from the fatal scourge of splenic fever, of fowl's cholera, and other diseases.

In the same manner, he dealt with splenic apoplexy, which he showed to be caused by the presence of specific bacteria in the blood. Pasteur's well-known treatment of hydrophobia is based on a similar principle, the spinal column of the infected animal serving as culture medium.

So numerous were the discoveries of this most noted physiologist in the domain of the microorganisms, and so successful the remedies he devised to defeat or minimize their injurious action, that the terms pasteurizing, pasteurism and pasteurization as nouns, and the verb to pasteurize, together with similar words in all the modern languages of civilized people, have passed into common usage, to mean all preventative or prophylactic systems devised, either by him or since his time, to counteract the evil effects of those minute organisms which are always present in the purest air and the cleanest environment, and are ever ready to attack and destroy.

IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

RIGHT ON TIME

THERE are many examples of how certain types of fish or birds always return to a certain spot at a certain time to reproduce, but the grunions, a species of small smelt, hold the record of being the most punctual and regular of them all. According to the Bureau of Fisheries, the grunions come out of the ocean every spring to lay their eggs in the wet sands of the California beaches. Starting on the third day after the full moon during the months of May, June, July, and August, they always appear one hour after high tide

Their reputation for punctuality is so widespread that the local newspapers print a schedule of their appearances and people for miles around come to watch the fish as they leave the water to lay their eggs.

* * *

A BLESSING THAT WENT SOUR

FOR many years, the inhabitants on the island of Jamaica in the West Indies were bothered by the great numbers of rats on the island. Plan after plan was tried to get rid of the rats—without success. Finally the British decided to import the mongoose, who is a natural enemy of both snakes and rats, from India where he is quite common.

The mongoose thrived in Jamaica and within a short time had killed a great majority of the rats on the island. The people and government officials were overjoyed at their success with the mongoose, but not for long. When the mongoose had killed off its food supply of rats, it developed a taste for birds and chickens. The birds and chickens had been keeping the insects on the island in check by eating them, but as the mongoose killed off the wild and domestic fowl, the insects began to multiply at an alarming rate

Now Jamaica is having trouble with the insects and the ever increasing mongoose population that has become a greater pest than the rats they destroyed. The problem before the government now is how to get rid of the mongoose, rats or no rats, so that the birds and chickens can live in peace and once again hold the insects in check.

* * *

A MEASLY $2.50 WAGER

HOW would you like to collect $2,084,405,605.22? Well, someone is going to collect that tidy sum, but not until the year 2432.

Two friends made a bet in Baton Rouge, La., but neither of them will ever know who won. J. D. Stotler bet R. E. Collins that Louisiana's $5,000,000 capitol building will stand up 500 years. Collins bet $2.50 that it wouldn't. And so the papers were signed and the money banked under contract in 1932. In the middle of July, 1938, the two friends again met in Baton Rouge, reaffirmed the bet and learned that their money had grown to $6.85 from the 4 per cent interest rate that will boost it above two billions in 500 years. The contract specifies for the bank to pay the money to the heirs of the winner.

I wish my great, great, grandpappy had thought of me in a similar way.

* * *

A GLIDER THAT CAN'T LAND

JUST picture in your mind, the predicament an army glider would be in if he was told that he could not land. But that is the problem faced every day by the greatest glider of them all, the man-o'-war bird.

This huge bird has a wingspread of over seven feet which enables him to stay in the air longer than any other bird. It prefers the great atmosphere over the warmer oceans and makes use of the many air currents found there to enable it to stay in the air so long.

The man-o'-war bird can never land on level ground, as it would be almost impossible for it to rise again. All of its leg bones, with the exception of the toes and ankle, are embedded in the bird's flesh and so the bird cannot walk. Moreover, if the bird ever landed in water it would drown.

Therefore, it makes its home on the edge of a cliff or a high limb of a dead tree. From this home, the bird jumps out into space and depends upon its wings and gliding skill for locomotion.

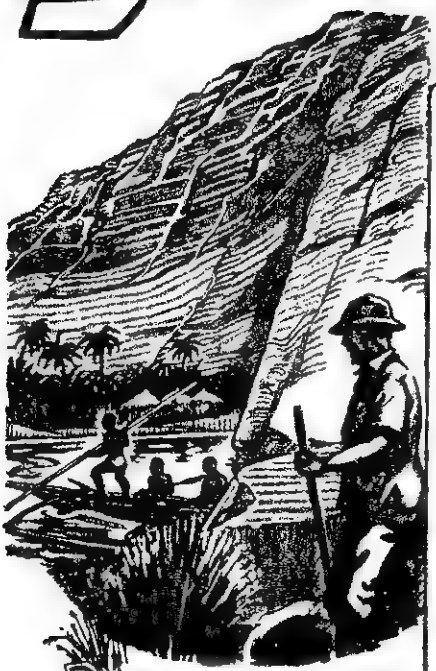
* * *

POWERFUL, BUT OH SO GENTLE

JUST imagine a machine that is so powerful that it can crush a locomotive boiler and yet so gentle that it can crack your wrist watch crystal without harming the movement. Such a machine is the hydraulic press put on display in March, 1940, in Pittsburgh. It is called the Templin Precision Metal Working Machine and is hailed by research workers of the Aluminum Company of America as the world's most powerful testing device.

The machine is capable of exerting a force of 3,000,000 pounds in compression (pushing) and 1,000,000 pounds in tension (pulling), yet it is so delicately balanced it will record the pressure required to crack an egg. The three story machine is more than forty feet high and sixteen feet wide.

Scientific



DR. L.B.S. LEAKEY, *famed Anthropologist*, REPORTS DISCOVERIES IN THE GREAT **RIFT VALLEY** OF **AFRICA** INDICATING THAT THE ANCIENT BEACHES UNCOVERED IN 1926 CORRESPOND TO THE WORLD FLOOD CYCLES.

ACCORDING TO MODERN SCIENTISTS, THE PRIMITIVE **AFRICAN BUSHMAN** PRESENTS THE GREATEST OF ALL ANTHROPOLOGICAL RIDDLES. HIS **BRAIN CAPACITY** IS **BETTER** THAN THE AVERAGE OF ANY LIVING RACE.

ON THE **FIRST BEACH** LEAKEY AND HIS CO-WORKERS UNCOVERED BURIALS OF A REMOTE RACIAL TYPE - CERTAINLY **NOT NEGROID**. BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED POTTERY, BEADS *and* FLINT MORTARS FOR CRUSHING GRAIN, INDICATED THEY WERE A PEOPLE *of* CULTURE.

Mysteries

RIDDLE OF THE AFRICAN BUSHMAN

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

(Illustrated by Joe Sewell)

Was the African Bushman once the superman of Earth's dim past? Here is a riddle of time which will make you think deeply

PROBABLY one of the most puzzling scientific riddles of all time is that of the African Bushman. When our parents and grandparents were going to college there was nothing remarkable about this small, unprepossessing and somewhat stupid savage, but recent investigations have concentrated the eyes of the scientific world upon him.

Now if there is one characteristic which distinguishes Modern man under the influence of civilization, it is the continual shrinking of the jaw. Neanderthal man for example, was not devoid of brain-capacity, but that capacity when taken in ratio to his powerful jaw was certainly less than the Modern skull. Similarly, the ancient skulls of Cro-Magnon display a jaw that is greatly superior to their descendants, and more than proportionately superior to their unusual brain-capacity.

Knowing all of these facts, science naturally expected to find the fossil men in Bushman territory to be small-brained and great-jawed creatures. Instead, anthropologists received one of the most profound shocks of their lives when between 1927 and 1930 skeletons of supposed Bushman ancestry were uncovered which were not only much greater-brained, but in some cases the brain-jaw ratio made them less primitive than their descendants!

In the little inlet of Fish-Hoek, near Cape Town, a resident with scientific interest took pains to study scientific excavation, and then went to work in the local cave under the partial direction of the near-by university. At first he came upon a layer of crude culture, with skeletons which were similar to the Bushmen. Below this was a layer with strong Mousterian influence In Europe, this culture is always associated with Neanderthal man. Therefore he had every right to expect the discovery of a Neanderthal burial. A burial was found below this layer but the skeleton was not Neanderthal. He was much closer to Cro-Magnon!

Prof. M. R. Drennan of the Cape Town University was much excited at this find, and his enthusiasm soon communicated itself to the entire scientific world. Then for the first time the eyes of the world's anthropologists turned inquiringly upon the Bushman. And indeed, well might they have done so, for this ancient African was narrow-nosed. His cheek bones were high and prominent, his brain-capacity better than the average for any living race of men, while his jaw and teeth were proportionately small!

In this matter of jaw-to-brain ratio, this ancient African from Fish-Hoek is amazing. For each cm of palate, he has 66.6 cc of brain-space. In other words, as Dr. Keith has worked out this table, he stands 1:66 6. The ratio is greater than in any adult skull from either ancient or living races. The closest ratio is to be found in living Europeans, which is no higher than 1:60.

Yet in spite of this little matter of brain-superiority, his living descendant is the modern Bushman!

SUSPICIOUS scientists immediately compared skulls from this tribe of negroes. In spite of the fact that the Bushman skulls were much smaller, they were of the same shape. Bushman teeth are smaller than those of other negroes. When placed against the ancient skull, the face and teeth were seen to have changed but little, and the great difference in the size of the head caused the change in ratio. However, when the face of another negro tribe was placed against the face of the ancient African, the modern negro proved to have the larger teeth and a more chinless type of jaw than the ancient African!

Now if this had been the only discovery, we would be more than justified in being skeptical, for individual differences are tremendous, even among the modern low-capacity Bushmen skulls. However, such is not the case. In the northern Transvaal, is an arid country called Springbok Plains which was once, in another climatic cycle, a fertile woodland. Apparently a body had once been buried here, the soil around it had become swampy and turned into limestone from the water

which came up through basaltic rock, and over that had blown the red earth of the present desert. Such geological changes as these had, of course, taken untold thousands of years.

When freed from their rocky matrix, the petrified bones proved that the individual had been a large man with great brain-capacity, long nose, strong jaw, but proportionately small teeth. Near the skeleton was the limb-bone of the extinct giant buffalo. Furthermore, at Hagenstad in the Orange Free State a culture very similar to the European Aurignacian is found with the remains of this animal. The European Aurignacian culture is that of Cro-Magnon Man.

Nor is this all the evidence. When L. Leakey graduated in anthropology in 1926 from Cambridge, he decided to go back to the country he knew from childhood, namely the Great African Rift Valley, and explore its extinct beach levels for vestiges of prehistory. (What he lacked in money he made up for in enthusiastic student volunteers.)

Geologists tell us that the three land-locked lakes of this giant earth-crack were once one sheet of water. Leakey found three old beaches, one at 300 ft. above the present water-line, one at 600 and one at 800. He was of the opinion that these correspond to the pluvial cycles of Europe, and many geological observers agree.*

ON THE 393 ft. level of the Nakuru Basin, Leakey found some ancient burials which had been disturbed by the valley being twice filled and twice drained since they were placed there. Altogther twenty six individuals were found, and all were of the same racial type. They were tall disharmonics with long heads and wide high cheekbones, while the chins were firm and the noses thin and hawked. The skull-capacity was excellent. Certainly not a negroid type.

Yet most amazing of all was that they were surrounded with beads, implements worked in flint and stone mortars for crushing grain, showing that they had a cereal food! Must one go back through the pluvials (world-floods) of the glacials to find the time when—untold millenniums ago, this village grew its grain and buried its dead beside this lake? Beautiful bits of finely-decorated pottery reminded the young excavators that these were, like the old pre-Egyptians, a people with an ancient culture.

Leakey, and his men now climbed to the 600 ft. beach. Here they found a large cave and once more began their careful work, keeping a map of the soil, cultures, etc. When after digging through several levels, the investigators found typical Mousterian culture, they thought that at last Neanderthal man would be uncovered. They were disappointed.

When they returned in 1928 and continued, they fully expected to find the skeleton of the type always connected with this culture. The bones of the animals which he had tossed away from his feasts were those of his period. Yet the skeleton of the Neanderthals still eluded him, as he passed the level and came to an earlier level. With amazement, the young investigators saw that this culture was Aurignacian! Had Cro-Magnon man preceded Neanderthal—in Africa? They came to a burial. This seemed to be the answer to their questions. With trembling hands they uncovered the skull. It was the skull of a tall disharmonic. The cheekbones had been wide. The nose had been thin and hawked. The skull capacity was the exceptional one of The Old Red Race! And then as if in confirmation, were found a few pottery fragments.

Leakey does not attempt to answer the question which he has uncovered. He does not suggest *what* the strip of Neanderthal culture may mean *above* that of The Old Red Race. Yet we find ourselves wondering if when Neanderthal man entered Africa, he already found his European conqueror in possession? And then the inevitable question—was Neanderthal man again exterminated, or did he spare some of the Cro-Magnon women?

There are no other possibilities in this racial clash. The modern negro is neither, *but has he some of the blood of each?* It is a daring thought because the negro has a skull of Modern man. Yet we are emboldened by the realization that a Neanderthal skull was found in Syria, that of a young woman, which might have been a cross.

FOR a moment, let us review the points of the typical skull which mark it as either Neanderthal or Modern. First, the greater thickness of the Neanderthal; second, the unusual teeth; third, the huge bony eye-ridges; fourth, the thick neck; and last, the protruding mouth. The negro seems to have two of these points though not by any means strong enough to mark him as a descendant.

He has a thicker skull than other subdivisions of Modern man.

Perhaps the sun is responsible for that. It may be only the reaction of the living type to protection for the brain from unusual heat. But those protruding teeth? It is true that the ancient specimens had slightly protruding mouths, but their teeth were no larger than those of the other modern races, and the effect was no more noticeable than it is in the other subdivisions. Yet the negro race has such large teeth that the effect is at once a racial characteristic.

There is of course, the possibility that the negro is of the blood of some third invading race, such as the later "strandlooper" invasion which some scientists, in postulating a homeland, have called "Australoid." Yet if this is the case, what are we to say about the Bushman?

Truly the Bushman is the greatest anthropo-

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* *African Pluvial Periods and Prehistoric Man—J. Reid Moir also—Report on Quaternary Geol. of Rift Valley—Dr. Erik Nilsson.*

logical riddle on earth, for behind his large-brained and straight-faced Fish-Hoek ancestor, some anthropologists have placed another—a still larger-brained skull known as The Boskrop Man! As the scientist Keith puts the case: ". . . of all the evolutionary products of humanity known to us the Bushman type is the most remarkable. In its ancestral form it is the largest-brained type of humanity so far discovered." What has happened? What has caused the change in human type? Is it a strange strain in the racial type? Or the withering power of the tropical sun? What is evolution doing to the Bushman?

* * *

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USING FEAR TO WIN A WAR

ONE of the most effective methods that the Nazis have been using to help them conquer a nation is their ability to instill fear. By showing the people movies of the destruction caused by the powerful Nazi war machine in previously conquered countries, by using pamphlets, by using dive bombers and the terrible flame throwers, and by using huge tanks, the morale of the people has been shattered by fright.

"This device, however, is far from being a new invention. The records of Julius Caesar's campaign in England nineteen centuries ago tell of how the Britons painted themselves a dark blue which gave them a very gruesome appearance to throw fear into the Romans.

The American Indians used war paint, terrible-sounding war cries, and huge war drums to frighten the enemy.

Genghis Khan, in the 14th century, "softened" up nations he intended to attack by having traveling peddlers spread stories of the might of Khan's armies throughout the nation. His propaganda was so effective that the nations often surrendered without fighting.

The war-like tribes of Africa often adorned themselves with fantastic headdresses made from a lion's head or a human skull in an effort to scare the enemy.

The Maoris of New Zealand, a very war-like savage tribe, make faces at their opponents in battle to unnerve them. They even carve hideous faces on the prows of their war canoes to carry out the "fear" effect.

And today, in World War II, fear propaganda is again being used to win battles before they are fought.

THE MAN WHO RETURNED FROM DEATH

DRS. HERBERT D. ADAMS and Leo V. Hand of Boston recently told of a case in which the heart of a twenty year old boy stopped beating for twenty minutes, but he is still alive today.

Normally death occurs from seven to ten minutes after the heart stops beating. There are tiny nerve centers in the brain which control breathing and unless the heart continues to pump blood to them, the nerve centers die from blood starvation. Once they die, the patient cannot be saved even though the heart is forced to pump again.

This case was the result of good teamwork by the surgeons and a miracle. The surgeons were operating on the patient's chest when his heart stopped about two hours after anesthesia had begun. One of the quick-thinking surgeons placed his hand on the paralyzed heart and forced it to continue its motion artificially by contracting and expanding his hand. The other surgeon proceeded to inject stimulants into the heart. They had one "false alarm" when the heart beat naturally five or six times and then stopped again.

After twenty minutes, the heart resumed its normal beat and the operation was finished. The surgeons had been able to keep the brain nerve centers alive by the artificial respiration and circulation and by lowering the patient's head to help the blood flow.

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

HE'S MAD!

Sirs:

I am mad. Perhaps the maddest I've been in years. I'm boiling, riled and completely disgusted. Why, oh why did you have to dispose of Martin Brand so easily, so calmly. As a devoted reader of your mag. for the past five years, I demand that Martin Brand be brought back. Puleese, Mr. Irwin!

D. BRUCE BERRY,
1630 E. 6th St.,
Stockton, Calif.

Frankly, your editor, and Mr. Irwin, are at a loss as to how to bring Martin Brand back, no matter how successful the story has been. Naturally we are flattered to know we've presented a story for which the readers seem to be demanding a sequel, but confidentially, how can Brand get out of the hole he's in? If there ever was a spot to be in, that one's it! But we'll write Mr. Irwin and ask him to think about it. One thing is sure, this story is the smash hit of the season—for which both your editors and author Irwin thank you. We like praise like this—ED.

SOME CHOICE STORIES

Sirs:

I have read AMAZING and *Fantastic* every month for years and this is my first letter. Some of the best stories to date have been "Voyage That Lasted Six Hundred Years," "Sons of the Deluge," "Mystery of the Martian Pendulum," "Black World," "Battering Rams of Space" (a sequel please), "Secret of Planetoid 88", and in the recent issues "Vengeance of Martin Brand". Burroughs was and is always good, but please don't have St. John illustrate all the stories. Settles, Paul, and Fuqua are the best artists in the Stf. business. The magazine's okay as it is. No changes needed. I like a good variety of stories and the April, 1942, issue was a perfect one. More like it, please. Favorite writers are Hamilton, Wilcox, Binder, Burroughs, Repp, Steber, Wellman, and last but not least, McGivern. Keep up the good work.

(No Name),
Copalis Beach, Wash.

You've certainly named six very fine stories. We agree that they are worthy of inclusion on a list of "bests."—ED.

NEW MEMBER—WELCOME!

Sirs:

I'm a new member to your Discussions Corner and I've a few brickbats to throw. I've been enjoying your mag for 3 years and never had the courage to write, but I toss all timidness aside to tell you "The Sheriff of Thorium Gulch" was just plain *Corney*—Bah! Six-shooter stuff—

Although "Secret of the Earth Star" was enjoyable, it was similar to (the plot, I mean) the story Beau Geste—except for characters and era. Pul-eese Mr. Kuttner—more originality; even so you are a fine writer. I'm looking forward to the conclusion of "The Vengeance of Martin Brand"— It rates tops with me—Good Work! Irwin. I enjoyed all the other stories heaps, keep up this swell mag—the size is fine. I agree with Lynn H. Benham (Aug. issue) more letters. The articles were good—I liked them. McCauley did one swell job on front cover. Settles' (Is he new?) back cover was superb. All other illustrations were fine. Those footnotes are the best yet—(I'm kinda dense) and they help me to understand. I hardly expect to see this letter in print (I'd like to though), but I'm taking you at your word. You do read them, don't you?

KATHERINE WALRATH,
Monroe, Ore.

Absolutely, Katherine, we read 'em—and enjoy 'em! And we're really glad you tossed your timidness aside. Now don't stop writing!—ED.

ADVENTURE?

Sirs:

September cover good if you like adventure, but to a S-F fan it wasn't worth an empty jug of "Xeno".

Illustrations—fair, except for the one done for "Giants Beyond Pluto." It wasn't very accurate. "What's the airplane doing in the pic? Where are the space suits? If they're space suits I'll eat 'em. For one thing there is no air on Pluto. I don't see any face plate on the supposed space suits. There's also grass in the pic. On an ice covered planet it couldn't be possible.

"Peace Mission to Planetoid X" was superb Please more space novels by Swain.

"Blitz Against Japan" da— good. I usually don't like present war stories, but this one, well —.

I didn't start reading the serial until I got both instalments. "The Vengeance of Martin Brand"

even outrated "Disciples of Destiny." Don't let go of Irwin.

"Convoy in Space," "Robotcycle for Two," and "Giants Beyond Pluto" all tied for fourth. All swell stories.

"The Love Song of Lancelot Biggs" fifth. Bond seldom writes a lemon.

"Vengeance on Venus"—passable.

"Captain Stinky"—no comment.

THOMAS REGAN, JR.,
138 Townsend St.,
New Brunswick, N. Y.

P. S.—Back cover, what an improvement. Wow!

We had been of the opinion that rocket ships and ray guns were SF. Thus we felt the September cover was something besides adventure. Anyway, we are glad to know you think it was good.—ED.

AT ODDS WITH LEY

Sirs:

The article, "Jupiter, the Giant World," in the September issue of A.S. is truly amazing, amazing because it ignores some well-known facts of physics. For example, Mr. Ley states that a weight of a ton placed on a spring balance on Jupiter would show 2.584 tons. Mr. Ley should have stated whether this spring balance is at the equator, near one of the polar regions, or at an average point between. Ignoring centrifugal force of a huge sphere whirling at such a rapid rate (since this is a spring balance), it seems to me that a 7 percent depression (3000 miles) at the poles ought to render the last one or two decimal places somewhat uncertain. Just what is this difference in gravity between the equator and the poles? That a difference exists is quite apparent.

Mr. Ley also states: "There was poisonous methane in the air, but also on the ground." By methane, does Mr. Ley mean marsh gas (CH_4), the carburetted hydrogen of miners? I have worked in mines, and with a million other miners have breathed this gas, often in "firedamp" concentrations. This is the first I have heard of its being poisonous. (Or does one need to eat it to get poisoned?)

Jupiter's low specific gravity (1.3) is the most impressive fact that Mr. Ley mentions. Yet he fails to enlarge upon it. To me, this low density is proof that the actual solid globe of Jupiter is much smaller than the 81,000-87,000 miles in diameter usually given. Even assuming that the solid part of the planet is composed of the lightest of solid or liquid materials (water/ice, alumina, silica, ammonia, dry ice, etc.) the solid globe could hardly be two-thirds the accepted diameter—unless it was hollow.

May I point out that the mean specific gravity of the earth is close to an average of its common constituents such as iron, and the other metals on the one hand and the oxides—including alumina and water—on the other. By this same reasoning, Jupiter is hardly likely to contain much of

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the heavier elements unless they are offset by excessive quantities of the lighter elements and compounds, or by the above mentioned hollow core. The crust of the planet may be composed of water, methane and/or ammonia. Since ammonia is much lighter than water, the presence of this compound in large quantities may account for the low density (average). While at a pressure of one atmosphere (earthly, 14.7 lbs. absolute) ammonia must have a temperature less than minus 28 F. to remain liquid, this does not hold true if the pressure of its own vapor upon it is increased. For instance, if the partial pressure of the ammonia vapor in Jupiter's atmosphere and at the surface of the planet is 147 lbs. absolute, ammonia may remain liquid when at a temperature of plus 75 F. In this case Jupiter's oceans could well be liquid ammonia, with ammonia rains similar to the water rains of earth.

GEORGE HOLMAN,
c/o Mrs. George Blum,
Marissa, Illinois.

Maybe Mr. Ley will come forward with a response to your letter. If so, we will be glad to publish it.—ED.

WITH BELLS ON

Sirs:

In the last few issues of A.S. and F.A. you have featured novels and novelets. I like long stories. But I like short ones too. Now to August issue:

1. McCauley's work on the front cover wasn't so good. It looked more like a St. John cover.
2. The back cover by Settles was excellent.
3. The Vengeance of Martin Brand . . . 4 bells.
4. The Case of Jonathan Lane . . . 3 bells. I liked the unexpected end.
5. The Sheriff of Thorium Gulch . . . 2 bells. Could have been better.
6. Death Rides at Night . . . 3 bells.
7. The Last Hours . . . 3 bells.
8. Secret of the Earth Star . . . 4 bells. It tied with serial for action.
9. Into the Caves of Mars . . . 3 bells. A Pragnell story is always welcome.
10. Venusian Slave Smugglers . . . 1 bell. Very disappointing coming from an author of Powell's calibre.
11. Moon Madness . . . 2 bells.
12. Horsesense Hank in the Parallel Worlds . . . 2 bells. Not enough plot.

Well, I guess that's about it except for one thing. WHERE is Binder? And Wellman?

DICK HIRSCHFELD,
836 Washington Street,
Hollister, California.

Binder? How about last issue? Holler "nuff"? —ED.

PANACEA!

Sirs:

I have been an ardent reader of AMAZING STORIES for 5 years. I like to read science-fiction because it is different.

I just finished reading the Sept. issue and I found that the stories presented were interesting, but they still can't compare with the stories of

yesteryear. I could almost remember those days when I started to read a novel, a war couldn't dislodge me, but now it's inversely.

There is one good rule I always follow and that is, when I'm tired, irritable or disgusted I start reading A S. and before I know it, I'm in the pink—it worked wonders with me.

Classification of stories are a bit ticklish, but here goes

No. 1. Peace Mission on Planetoid X—A slow starter at the beginning and winding up with plenty of action to end a good novel.

No 2. The Vengeance of Martin Brand—Unfortunately I had to rate this story as second best because I missed last month's instalment. Had I read the entire novel I would select it as No. 1.

No. 3. Blitz Against Japan—Propaganda—it is swell reading matter—science-fictionally it doesn't live up to its expectations. Imagine a flyer learning the rudimentary of rocketry in a few hours, it's fantastically fantastic.

No. 4. Captain Stinky—An amusing story, plenty of laughs, never a dull moment.

No. 5. Convoy In Space—Keep those spacefem's out, especially those who can't take it.

No. 6. The Love Song of Lancelot Biggs.

No. 7. Robotcycle For Two.

No. 8. Vengeance on Venus—It is as good as Venusian stew, it stunk.

No. 9. Giants Beyond Pluto.

PVT. WM SADOWNICK, JR.,
A. A. A. Board,
Camp Davis, N. C.

Well, that makes us old Doc' Amazing, doesn't it? ED.

NOT AS GOOD?

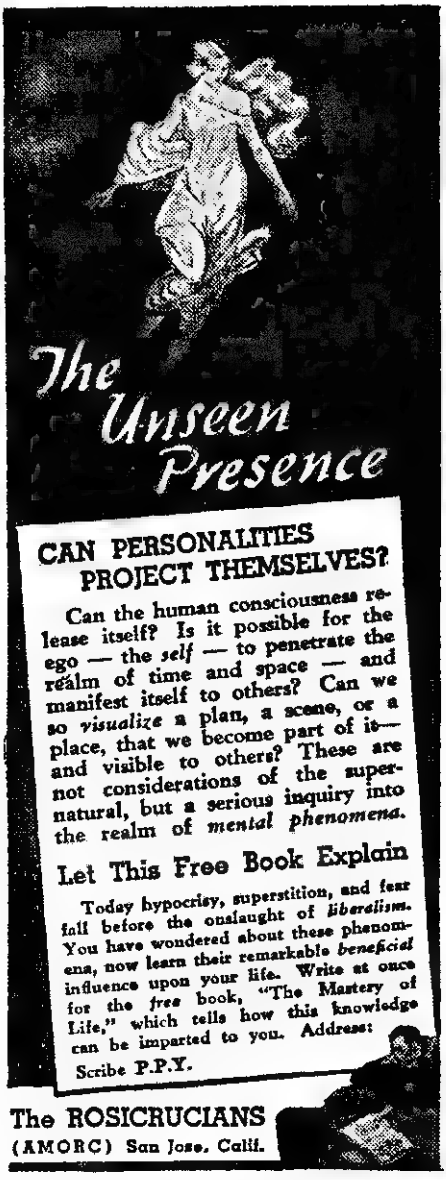
Sirs:

I'll bet I could safely wager that for every issue you've published of AMAZING for the last year, at least, you have received a letter from some old reader filled with anguish and appeal, begging you to try something—*something*—to improve the quality of your stories. Perhaps, because you've gotten so many pats-on-the back from relatively new readers, you haven't taken the former citizenry very seriously.

Frankly, your stories aren't as good as they were two years ago; much less than they were three years ago In a little over a year and a half, AMAZING hasn't had anything which was really a smash-hit. That used to be your specialty.

Of course, you have had some yarns that were popular enough to reach the top of your list. There was "John Carter and the Giant of Mars", a very nostalgic yarn for those who remembered Burroughs' Carter. For the rest of this series, though, he swept off on a new pace. He wasn't half so good as of old, but he did succeed in capturing this pace and making it interesting, as in "The Invisible Men of Mars".

Then there was "Battering Rams of Space", about the best of Wilcox's that I—a space yarn fan—have seen. Top that off with the "Test Tube Girl", and you have the only yarns worth mentioning. Subtract by three downright tear-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jerkers; "Big Man", "Mystery of the Martian Pendulum" (which features the best illust. in Krupa's career), and "The Last Hours". Which doesn't leave much.

You've been accused time and again of using yarns which are nothing but cheap adventure, and having very little science-fiction to show. My guess is that you've been too lenient with these authors! When the war came along, they were absorbed with the hatred of it all, and as result their yarns became comic-strip action with spineless, sniveling, pull-his-hair-in-desperation jerks for heroes. And, following your policy of letting the authors have free rein with their imaginations, you let them get away with it. That's darned nice of you, but to think that these authors —these creators of the reckless, Hell-for-breakfast, space-roving he-men of bygone days—would let a thing like a horde of stinking, filthy Japs do this to them is horrible!

Naturally, any story with a good "atmosphere" about it will turn out twice as good as one jammed with all the action its author is capable of. Very few of your stories have atmosphere now. Nor are there very many "idea" stories.

JOE GIBSON,
224 North High,
Albuquerque, N. M.

You certainly are choosey! Only three stories you actually liked, Burroughs, Wilcox, Patton. Well, at least you picked three boys who know how to write! We'll keep those three working on more stories to add to your lean list.—ED.

FROM DOWN UNDER

Sirs:

It's about time I dropped you a line about your magazine, since I've been reading it ever since it came under the Ziff Davis banner. Sometimes I wonder why I do read it. Perhaps I like it! But seriously, I've come across some 1933-1938 issues, and it's evident that you've come a long way since then. Now I won't say it's the best science-fiction magazine on the market, but it is good. I can always depend on it for some good, workmanlike science stories, even though they sometimes come wrapped up in unnecessary romantic and "cowboys and Injuns" trimmings. One beneficial result of this, however, is that it is never brain-fagging to go through an issue, and I very seldom have to re-read a story to get the science behind it.

Incidentally, the spur to this unwonted literary activity on my part consists of your 240 page January number. And I don't mean that May, 1940 issue: one expects something like that after those 15 long years. (I myself am only 3 years older than AMAZING.) No, what interested me was the fact that for no special occasion at all you put out such a bumper number. The three "novels" were good; the other six stories were good enough. That faint praise coming from me is quite a compliment; I very seldom come across an issue with which I am more than half-satisfied. Those 240 pages could spare 100 bad ones and still leave a magazine—full of good stuff.

Regarding the art work I like both the front and back covers They appeal to my fancy for bright colors. (That's how we spell it here.) I'm beginning to think that it is the covers that fascinate me into buying AMAZING. As for the interior illustrations, well, you've got something there! I refer, of course, to Finlay and Magarian: they're perfect! Fuqua, Krupa, Ruth and Paul are all okay, but Jackson and St. John leave me cold. Newman and Glueckstein are a fine pair of cartoonists: I am very much in favor of having cartoons in AMAZING. Humor is a serious neglect of many stf. magazines.

And what about the writers? Well, strange as it may seem, I am not very keen on Burroughs and Wilcox, but after E. R. B's "Tarzan of the Apes", all his later works seem to pale in comparison. I like Wilcox, but I'm afraid I can't rave about him like some of his fans do. My favorite authors in AMAZING are McGivern, Bond, Binder, Burroughs and Wilcox. The main thing, of course, is that the general standard of the writers is consistently high

SYDNEY ROME,
30, Stiemens St.,
Clifton,
Johannesburg,
South Africa.

We're glad to hear from "down under" again. And we appreciate your comments. They are well thought out and we know you'll be glad to know (as you must by now) that our special large size issues are no longer special, but regular.—ED.

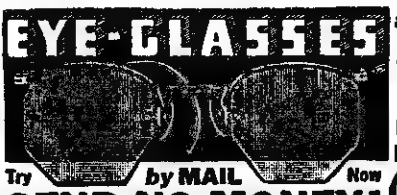
PRAISE FOR O'BRIEN

Sirs:

I thought I would like to let you know how much I enjoyed reading one of the yarns you featured in your July issue of AMAZING STORIES. I am referring to *Squadron of the Damned*, by David Wright O'Brien.

It is undoubtedly a story of the type of exciting action which easily manages to saturate the easy-chair adventurer's love of a rare treat. A truly fascinating and interesting story, capable of having arrested my undivided attention from beginning to end, I found it fascinating in all respects without it becoming at all fantastic. I like Mr. O'Brien's work and am eagerly awaiting his future stories.

There is one fault I found with his last story, however, which I thought stood out like the proverbial 'sore thumb'. After he carefully refrained from the use of surealism for almost all of the story, he happened to mention a patrol ship out in space climbing for altitude, and gaining speed in a dive. How can you determine whether a ship in space is diving, climbing or flying on a level course? I always pictured space as the region beyond the gravitational attraction of all planets and other heavenly bodies, where there is no gravity present. How then, while in a region void of all physical attraction from any direction whatsoever, could a space ship attain greater speed in any one direction than in another? Frankly, I don't get it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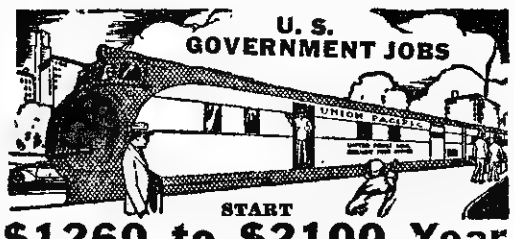

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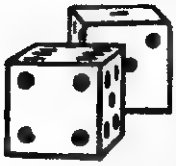

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I may be wrong in my suppositions as to the presence of gravity in space, especially where I say "beyond Gravitational attraction". I have always thought that gravitational attraction ended a certain distance from the planet's surface, the distance pertaining to the size of the particular planet. For all I know, though, the gravitational attraction of one planet might extend through space, until it meets that of another planet at a point where forces are equalized by each other. Perhaps you would be able to set me straight on this problem.

WILLIAM A. BUCKNER,
169 Rose Street,
Buffalo, New York.

Gravitational attraction of a body in space goes on indefinitely, to the limits of the universe, theoretically, although lessening with the square of the distance in an inverse manner, which makes its influence infinitesimally negligible even at a comparatively near point insofar as distance in space goes.

A space ship can "dive" in space, simply by heading toward a planet, or a sun. This gives the direction we know as "down."—ED.

CRUEL IRWIN!

Sirs:

For two years I have read your AMAZING mag, and I have found it the best on the market. I have always wanted to write and now I have finally got up enough courage.

I have just finished the Sept. issue and I thought it was the best issue you put out in a long time. I rate the five best stories as follows:

1. The Vengeance of Martin Brand—A great story, but did not care for ending. I thought Martin would marry Kathleen.
2. Peace Mission to Palentoid X—Good; how about more from Swain?
3. Vengeance on Venus—Good, it is different.
4. Convoy in Space—Fair, same old story.
5. Blitz Against Japan—Doesn't click for future mag.

The stories on a whole were very good. I would like longer stories and less shorts. Nelson S. Bond sure laid an egg with his Lancelot Biggs story. The Observatory was very good, wish it was longer. Tell G. H. Irwin not to be so cruel with his endings. How about some more P. F. Costello, Burroughs, and Adam Link stories? How about a good interplanetary war yarn? Well that covers about everything, and you can rest assured as long as your mag. is as good as it is now I will remain satisfied.

DAVID WACHS,
% Gelernter,
208 Hendly St.,
Macon, Ga.

OUCH!

Sirs:

Strange that you should give such a build-up to your poorest story!

I expected 'Robotcycle for Two' to be a story that would entertain, please, fill me with wonder.

I cannot remember ever having read anything more flat and more stale.

The old, old, worked to death plot of the man who goes blind. "The Light That Failed—When Darkness Came"—etc. The Juveniles are rejecting them.

Still, I trusted you, Mr. Editor. You must have found something in that story that justifies the title of your magazine. AMAZING. I read on. With a great effort I forced myself to read on through that flat, almost plotless yarn where there is no suspense, no danger, no menace, nothing wonderful, no escape of any sort. You failed me.

Ah! When both are blind in the machine, I hoped. They are about to discover wonderful powers, guidance, presences in the other world perhaps, communication with other planets that can reach no one else. But instead, there is only the noise of clicks-clicks made by the cracks of the sidewalks. My impression was that it sounded like a box of bolts and nuts being shaken.

How better it would have been for your readers, and for yourself, Mr. Editor, if you had rejected this worthless script.

GEORGE W. HALL,
328 West 6th St.,
Sioux Falls, So. Dak.

A LIST OF BESTS

Sirs:

Here's a list of the finest stories, in my opinion, that have appeared in your magazine in the last two years.

Sept. '40—Champlin Fights The Purple God (Wilcox). Action at its finest.

Oct. '40—The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years (Wilcox). Different.

Nov. & Dec. '40—West Point 3000 A. D. (Wellman). Futuristic fiction.

Jan. '41—John Carter And The Giant Of Mars (Burroughs). The master returns.

Feb. '41—Adam Link In The Past (Binder). Best since "I Robot".

Mar. '41—The City Of Mummies (Burroughs). Fine beginning.

Apr. '41—Lords Of The Underworld (Hansen). Excellent fantasy.

May '41—The Lost Race Comes Back (Wilcox). Entire issue good.

June '41—Black Pirates Of Barsoom (Burroughs). He gets better every time.

July '41—Survivors From 9000 B. C. (Williams). Below your fine average.

Aug. '41—Yellow Men Of Mars (Burroughs). Perfect.

Sept. '41—Enchantress Of Lemuria (Coblentz). Different.

Oct. '41 Invisible Men Of Mars (Burroughs). Best of series.

Nov. '41—Convoy To Atlantis (McGivern). My opinion of this author rises.

Dec. '41—Secret Of Planetoid 88 (Repp). Get more stories by Repp.

Jan. '42—The Test Tube Girl (Patton). Patton's

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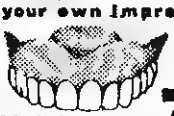

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Feb. '42—The Immortality Of Allan Whidden (Farley). Time tale terrific.

Mar., April '42—Disciples Of Destiny (Wilcox) At his best.

May '42—Lord Of The Crystal Bow (Farnsworth). Not as good as previous yarns.

June '42—Gods Of The Jungle (Bond). Very fine tale.

July '42—The Return Of Hawk Carse (Gilmore). Just topped the last part of Bond's story.

Aug., Sept. '42—The Vengeance Of Martin Brand (Irwin). Irwin tops.

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CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Joe Hensley, 411 S. Fess St., Bloomington, Indiana, would like to hear from anyone having Taines, Englands, Merritts and Klines books for trade or sale. He would also like to obtain E. E. Smith's "Spacehounds of the T.P.C." . . . S. M Ritter, 1160 Simpson St., New York City, has about 70 magazines more than he has room for, would like to trade them for history, biography, travel, anthropology, archaeology and other non-fiction books. . . . Anyone who wishes to sell the October, 1938, issue of AMAZING STORIES, please contact Neil Crandall, 112 North 31 Ave., Omaha, Nebr. . . . Josephine Browne, 959 S. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, Calif., would like to hear from boys in the armed forces from the ages of 18 to 22. She is 17, 5′ 6½″ tall, has brown hair and green eyes, likes dancing and swing music. Will answer all letters received . . . Mrs. R. L. Shaffer, 2833 Frederick Ave., Baltimore, Md., wishes to buy any and all fantasy books of mags, especially any by Merritt or Lovecraft, that were printed before March, 1941. . . . Corporal Mike Pejaski –USMC, MB—Naval Air Station, Tongue Point, Oregon, wishes to correspond with all persons, all ages on subjects relating to esoteric knowledge and science-fiction. Age 20, has been in the Marine Corps for over two years. Photographs promised to those replying as long as supply lasts. Promises to answer all letters. . . . Ruth Unangst, 1708 Crank Ave., Flint, Mich., wants pen pals, service men under 21 or 22 preferred, but will try to answer all letters. She is 5′ 1¼″, and has black natural curly hair. . . . Jack Fortado, Box 314, Rodeo, Calif., has various issues of AMAZING STORIES in excellent condition dating from 1928 to 1932 which he wishes to dispose of at original price plus postage. . . . C. W. Philpot, 326 College Place, Laurens, S. C., is interested in home movies and photography. . . . Charles McNutt, 3025 Ainslie St., Chicago, Ill. would like very much to contact new amateur writers for his new fanzine *Starlit★Fantasy*. Those interested please get in touch with him. . . . Emanuel Andrews, 7304 Tioga St. (8), Pittsburgh, Pa., would like to correspond with boys and girls and enlisted men. He is 13 years old. . . . Fred DeBlon, 112 Braun Ave., Highland Park, New Brunswick, N. J.,

wishes to buy back issues of AMAZING STORIES and *Fantastic Adventures;* also magazine stories by Edgar R. Burroughs. Will pay cash or swap pigeon books. . . . Bill Stoy, 140-92 Burden Crescent, Jamaica, N. Y., has for sale the following Burroughs books at $.70 each (including mailing cost)—The Warlord of Mars, The Master Mind of Mars, At the Earth's Core, Back to the Stone Age, Swords of Mars, Pirates of Venus, and Lost on Venus. Also Balmer and Wylie's "When Worlds Collide" for $.40. All in good or excellent condition. . . . Joseph Vallin, 5809-33 St., Washington, D. C., and Fred Ordway, 2929 Ordway Street, Washington, D. C., would like to start a S.F. club in Washington for males and females between the ages of 13 and 18. . . . Keith Dolan, 9345 National Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif., would like to correspond with boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 20, all over the U. S. Also all readers that would like to form a fantasy society either in California or nation wide. . . . Zona Elliott, Box 54, Hillside, Arizona, age 16, would like to hear from boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 21. All letters will be answered promptly. . . . J. Frankel, 441 Alabama Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., has some rare stamps to trade for back issues of science fiction mags. . . . Wanted: Any back issues of Weird Tales before January, 1938. In the market for old AMAZINGS, preferably pre-'37. Has many books and magazines of a fantastic or sci-fictional order. Will buy back issues if owners do not wish to trade for other magazines or books. Write to: Bill Blackbeard, 216 Orchid Avenue, Corona del Mar, Calif. . . . J. Greene, 1237 Seventh St., Port Arthur, Texas, has all parts of "Skylark Three" and "The Skylark of Valeron" for sale to highest bidder. Also has a private collection of 240 science fiction mags for sale—send requests for magazines or lists. . . . John Anderson, 3526 Philwood, Memphis, Tenn., is interested in Black Magic. He would like to get a price list of some B. M. books. The books if possible should have materials needed for experiments printed in with the formulas. . . . H. Loren Senn, Carnation, Route 1, Wash., would like to correspond with anyone around sixteen years old, anywhere, interested in science and science fiction. . . . Thomas Lupi, Ave. H. Irigoyen 412, Villa Dolores (Cba) F.C.P., Argentine, would like to correspond with pen pals from over the world interested in anything, anyone, any age and either sex . . . Charlie Lee Morris, 106 Towers St., Anderson, So. C., will trade 1940 41-42 issues of S-F mags. for 1930-32 issues of AMAZING STORIES or any other back issues of S-F mags.—he has around 45 S-F mags. to trade. . . . Harold Kleemeyer, 7103—69 Street, Glendale, N. Y., wishes to sell AMAZING STORIES, July, 1929. The magazine has all pages and two covers. . . .

Sydney Rome, 39, Stiemens Str., Clifton, Johannesburg, South Africa, age 18½, Arts student at the University of the Witwatersrand, would like very much to correspond with any American science- and fantasy fiction fans on any subjects whatever, and promises to answer all letters.

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GLIDER OF GANYMEDE

By Henry Gade

On this world, where air currents swirl about precipitous mountain slopes, the glider principle prevails

GANYMEDE is perhaps a bit larger than our own Luna, being 3,273 miles in diameter. It is a rugged world, composed of low, jagged ranges of crystal cliffs rather than high mountains. Because of the more or less barren desert nature of the general terrain, the atmosphere in the vicinity of these cliffs is agitated and thrown aloft in spiraling currents along the ridges. Such air currents provide ideal glider currents, and since the world does not seem to have been fortunate enough to have provided its inhabitants with a very great opportunity for a highly developed civilization, we may assume that their engineering skill is rather limited. Thus the aircraft of this world, without stretching the imagination too far, could logically be assumed to be of the kite or glider type.

Since the gravity of Ganymede is perhaps one-fourth that of Earth (it would be possible to construct quite large glider planes which would perform in the air currents with great efficiency.

They probably weigh much more than practical, to judge from Earth gravity standards, but on Ganymede, their heaviness of construction lends sturdiness to them which permits glider capacity and performance unknown here on Earth.

The glider of Ganymede, launched from its catapult on the top or side of the inevitable pink cliffs, would be able to soar on the ridge currents for many hundreds of miles, on a planned route and return which would be as reliable in performance as a mechanically powered aircraft.

The craft itself would be a large thing, compared to our tiny gliders, surpassing even the huge ships proposed as cargo carriers in this second world war. They would range from passenger ships a mere three hundred feet long, to huge cargo carriers as much as a thousand feet long which could circle to whole planet using glider principles for their sole motive power.

Mechanically they would be constructed much as are Earth gliders, having a torpedo shaped fuselage, on the general shape adopted by almost all aircraft except the flying wing. They would possess huge wings extending out from the fuselage for support, and rudders at the rear for steering.

Mounted in the nose would be a series of smaller wings which could be used to lift the nose of the ship out of speed-producing dives, and to utilize the greatest portion of the "lift" energy of the air currents rising from the ridges of the cliffs above which the ship generally travels.

This principle of taking up added impetus by diving into an up-sweeping current of air, and then riding it aloft for more height would be almost instinctive with the Ganymedean. He would be able to handle his great ship just as a boy handles a kite, sending it ever higher simply by little tugs on the string, except that in gliding, the "string" is the uprising current of air from the unevenly heated surface, and from the slopes that turn winds into an upward course.

The people of Ganymede are very agile, being a half-human, half-cat race. Perhaps they developed the principle of glider flying from evolutionary days when, like the flying monkey of our own South America, they leaped from cliff-sides and by spreading the loose skin of their body and arm surfaces, floated and skimmed down to the surface. Being cat-like, climbing back to the heights was equally easy.

The glider of Ganymede is probably constructed almost entirely of wood, and fibrous plants. The use of hardwoods in body construction is permissible because of the light gravity. Thus we have giant glider liners with as solid construction as an ocean liner, yet as comparatively light and maneuverable as an Earth airplane.

On both wings, and along the base of the fuselage, sturdy wooden runners are constructed, so that the glider can land, either on the cliff tops, on prepared runways, or on the desert area on both sides of the cliff-ranges.

The adjustable wings in the forepart of the ship can be used to brake the ship almost to a stop before gliding in to land. Thus, long runways would be unnecessary, and in the event of forced landings, a safe landing could be effected even atop a precipitous cliff with little room to spare. Take-off from such places would also be easy, since a false start would only mean another simple emergency landing further down the slope.

The glider of Ganymede is the ultimate "kite" used to transport both freight and passengers on the wings of the wind itself.

Meet the Authors

I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on April 15, 1908. Before my first birthday, the family moved to Arapahoe, Nebraska (population 1000) in the southwestern part of the state.

During the first twelve years of my life I went through the same experiences of almost any other boy who lived in a small midwestern town. There were school-day escapades and marbles and swimming. A series of hills, known locally as the "bluffs" served as an excellent location for hikes and arrow-head hunts and cowboy and Indian games.

Reading held my greatest interest, however. I discovered the Tarzan books during this period, believed in them implicitly, and practised tree-swinging in the heavy growth along the Republican river banks. Other favorite books, read many times, were the Henty series, Rover Boys, Horatio Alger, Sir Rider Haggard, Richard Harding Davis, Mark Twain, etc., etc. When the town's small Public Library was exhausted, I raided the bookshelves of the townspeople. Whenever a family moved into Arapahoe in those days, the housewife wouldn't have her pictures hung before I was knocking at the door to ask if she had any books!

In 1919 my father died, and mother and I moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. There, I attended high school, graduated after a decent interval and entered the University of Nebraska, where I made a fruitless attempt to become a member of the Cornbusker football team.

My first effort at this business of writing appeared as a serial story in the high school weekly.

Later, several of my short stories appeared in *Awgawan*, the University magazine.

I did not return to the University after my second year, accepting, instead, an offer to cover high school sports for an Omaha newspaper. I stuck at that for a year, held a few other short-lived jobs that amounted to little, and, in 1926, hitch-hiked east to Chicago.

That was sixteen years ago, and I'm still in Chicago. During the first three years I worked as (1) an order picker in a steel foundry, (2) waiter in a tuberculosis sanitarium, (3) shipping clerk in a State Street department store, (4) butter and egg salesman, (5) night clerk in a small hotel, (6) collection correspondent in an outlying department store, (7) machine operator for a furniture manufacturer, and (8) collection correspondent for another State Street department store. The last kept me at the same desk for seven years; during the 1930-'36 period you held onto your job and hoped it would last!

In 1936 I accepted a position as Credit Manager for one of the largest retail furniture chains in the country—and abandoned it for editing.

Howard Browne

While all the above was transpiring, I acquired a wife, a son and a daughter. If I never do anything else, I'll at least have that much to the credit side of my personal ledger!

Sometime during the latter part of 1937 I went back, in a part time way, to writing. I used up almost every Sunday in two years doing a novel about a Cro-Magnon man of twenty thousand years ago. It made up in length for what it lacked in merit—five hundred pages that bounced around publishers' offices all over the East. Four editors offered to print it if I'd cut the wordage in half. I said something like, "What! All them beautiful words? Nothing doing!" to the first three. But the fourth editor verbally beat some sense into my skull; and with much suffering, I cut and cut—and cut! The windup: the book will be out next Spring, but AMAZING gives it to you now!

In the meantime, I did a second novel, called *Halo in Ink*, on which the war has halted publication.

My first shot at this market was taken at the invitation of AMAZING's editor. The fact that he was unwary enough to buy that first story may lead to certain complications neither of us can foresee . . .

If I can swing it, you readers are going to see a lot more words by me in future issues of this magazine.

Howard Browne

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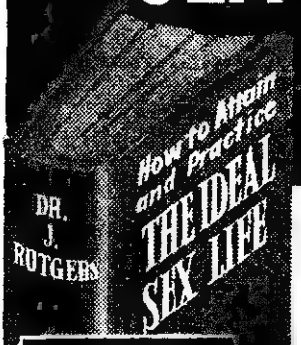

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MONSOONS OF DEATH

(Concluded from page 221)

he said. He suddenly grinned. "You've lost your glasses."

"I won't miss them," Halliday said. "I didn't need them. I wore them to give me something to do, that's all. But we're going to have plenty to do, now."

Ward swallowed with difficulty. He knew that in his wild, thoughtless act of heroism he hadn't redeemed himself. Redemption would come from a lifetime of playing the game the way men like Halliday did. But the chance was there for him, and he was glad that he could start immediately.

"Whatever you say," he said. He grinned, and added, "—boss."

THE END

BLIND TO GET SIGHT FROM THE DEAD

A TRULY humanitarian venture has been organized in northern California recently. It is called the Dawn Society and its avowed purpose is to give the eyes of its members who die, to blind people so that they may see.

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Many people have made oral promises bequeathing their eyes for this use after death, but relatives of the deceased interceded to prevent the eyes from being removed.

Realizing that something must be done, the Dawn Society was organized and each member signs that both his eyes may be removed after death. Within six hours after death the eyes are removed and placed under refrigeration in a light saline solution, which can preserve the eyes in perfect condition for two weeks, if necessary. But storing is not a problem as the demand for the eyes exceeds the supply many times over.

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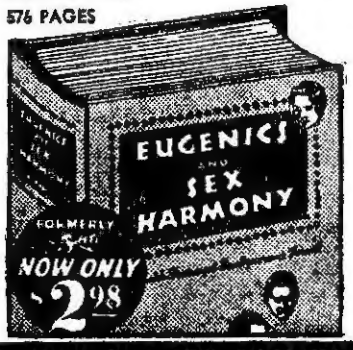

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Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a NEW MAN of Might and Muscle!

WILL you give me just 15 minutes a day of your spare time? That's all I need to PROVE—regardless of how old or young you are, or how ashamed you may be of your present physique—that I can give you a body men envy and women admire. Biceps that can dish it out, and a muscle-ridged stomach that can take it. A full, deep barrel-chest. Legs that never tire. A tough, sinewy back. An all-around physique that can laugh at ANY kind of rough going.

We're ALL in the Army today! The heavy war-time demands on strength and endurance are no longer limited to front-line trenches. It's only a matter of time until EVERY citizen is called to shoulder his full share of the load. ALREADY the Army has enrolled men from 18 to 64. And whether you do your part in Uncle Sam's Services or as a home-front civilian, you've GOT to be in 100% SHAPE. Every man, young or old, owes it to himself to get a body with the bulldog staying power that double shifts of working call for. HOW DO *YOU* STACK UP?

Would You Believe I Was Once a 97-lb. Weakling?

Yes, I *was*—a miserable 97-pound bag of skin and bones. But you'd never believe it to look at me now, would you? Through my discovery of *"Dynamic Tension"* I changed myself into "The World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man." I'm LIVING PROOF of the miracles *"Dynamic Tension"* can perform—right in the privacy of your own home! NOW—will you give my method 15 minutes a day to get the kind of HE-MAN build you have always longed to have?

FREE BOOK

Just a postage stamp will bring you your copy of my famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," absolutely free. No wonder nearly 2,000,000 men have sent for this big 48-page story of *"Dynamic Tension"*—illustrated with action photos of myself and some of my pupils. You'll not only read about my secret of *"Dynamic Tension"*—but you SEE PROOF of it! *CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9ZA, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.*

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115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

GLIDER OF GANYMEDE

Since there is no engineering science on Ganymede, the airship of that world is constructed on the glider principle.

(See page 238 for complete story)